

ACTION-SCIENCE-ADVENTURE

NO
79

AUTHENTIC

SCIENCE FICTION MONTHLY



ASSASSIN IN HIDING

Philip E. High

24

AUTHENTIC

Editor: E. C. TUBB

SCIENCE FICTION

APRIL, 1957 • No. 79

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Cover by *Blandford*, illustrating *Assassin in Hiding*
Interior illustrations by *Blandford*, *Adash*, *P. R. Green*

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Printed in Great Britain and published by Hamilton & Co. (Stafford), Ltd., 108, Brompton Road, London, S.W.3., England.

editorial



ONE OF THE more interesting sidelights in the field of science fiction is the naming of names. As the business of science fiction is prophecy the authors were up against it from the start. They could, and did, write about the future together with the inventions and discoveries they assumed would be made, but when it came to naming these things they were stuck.

They were stuck because it is a fact that it is impossible to describe something without the use of familiar terminology. Words can be invented but they are meaningless until they can be applied to something within the experience of the reader. You doubt it? Then make sense of this:

"Conrad Jackson stepped from his suasph and stared around him. All was quiet, too quiet. A sudden movement caught his eye and he turned, whipping out his glict. A noise from the lephthen distracted him and . . ."

Well, you get the idea. Now change spaceship for suasph, blaster for glict and radio for lephthen and you begin to make some sense.

But only because you already have a mental picture of what those words represent.

In the early days of science-fiction writing, authors did use such an invented terminology—those were the days when the magazines were heavy with footnotes explaining just what the weird and wonderful words were supposed to represent. We don't get that now and we have better reading because of it. Authors are expected to weave their explanations into the body of the story so that, if they do use a word like suasph, the readers will know what it is, how it works and what it is supposed to do. The authors, having a hard enough job trying to create a complete future society as it is, tend to stay away from such words or use words with self-explanatory meanings. And in order to do that they have to remain, terminologically at least, in the present time.

The problem isn't new; they had it way back when men were first dreaming about the horseless carriage. When the first mechanical vehicle took to the roads that's

just what it was called. It took time for the horseless carriage to become an automobile. A Victorian writer, attempting to describe the future in which such vehicles were commonplace, could only call them horseless carriages. He could give them any name he chose, but he would have to explain that the glyphs, or whatever he called them, were horseless carriages. Any other explanation wouldn't have made sense to his readers.

It was the same with radio. Not until radio had been invented and was in use did it drop the original name of wireless. It couldn't. Radio, to the old-timers, was a meaningless jumble of sounds while wire-less reception was self-explanatory. Radar and television are two things which have been forecast and described since the early days of science fiction. But then they weren't called radar and television. We had detector screens and vision-screens and while the explanations of what these things were and how they operated was given, their final names weren't. They had to wait until after the concepts had turned into reality.

Will it be the same with the spaceship?

The spaceship is the mainstay of science fiction and it has been with us from the beginning. There have been other attempts at describing the same thing: rocket

ships, etherships, star-ships but, with or without the hyphen, used as one word or as part of a word, "ship" has always been with us.

And, of course, it is quite wrong. Ships belong to the sea, not drifting around in space. To call a vessel designed and built for traversing the void a "spaceship" is as logical as calling a vehicle built and designed to travel on roads a "groundship." We don't have groundships and we don't have railships or aeroships, either. For a while we had airships, but they stemmed from the original balloons and the name was quickly dropped in favour of dirigible.

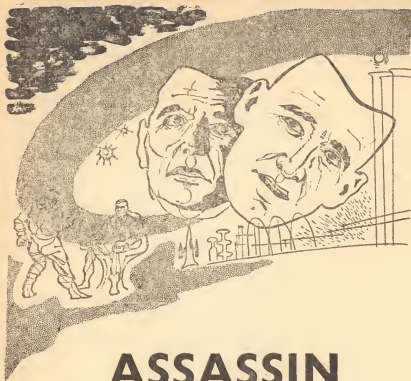
There is no real logic in the naming of names, and it is quite possible that the vessels which finally traverse the void will be named after an inventor, or even a politician. Maybe our future heroes will climb into their McStuarts or Gunthers. That is just as logical as calling a lifejacket a Mae West, a portable rocket-missile weapon a bazooka or a self-propelled, armed and armoured offensive weapon a Sherman or a Churchill.

So far the record of success of science fiction for the correct naming of names has been regrettably low. But I'm hoping that this time we can make one name at least stick.

I'd hate to see the last of the spaceship.

E.C.T.





ASSASSIN IN HIDING

by PHILIP E. HIGH

THE ULTIMATE IN WEAPONS IS THE ONE WHICH
CANNOT BE SEEN, TOUCHED, SMELT, TASTED OR
HEARD. AND THE ULTIMATE HIDING PLACE IS EQUALLY
OBVIOUS

A SPECIALLY chartered ambulance brought De-Arva from the hospital to his home and a small crowd was gathered near the door.

A reporter stepped forward as the artist was helped from the ambulance. "Congratulations, Mr. De-Arva—a narrow escape."

De-Arva smiled, showing his small, perfect teeth. "You are so kind, everyone is so kind."

The reporter held up a telemike. "Would you care to say a few words, sir?"

"But certainly." He smiled again. "Thank you all for your enquiries. I feel that you are all my friends, bless you." He stepped adroitly past the reporter and into his home.

They were all there, the usual crowd, artificially glad to see him and, incidentally, and as usual, drinking his liquor.

Moirá put her soft arms round his neck and kissed him. "My dearest, I was so worried for you." Almost she looked as if she meant it. "When I heard of the crash and realised you were in it—" A tear rolled from under long lashes.

De-Arva patted her cheek gently. "Such a perfect little actress; real tears. Emozine?" He wondered if she had thought about him at all, apart from the fact that she might have needed another protector. She had been unfaithful, of course;

she always was, probably with Leonard; not that he cared.

She pouted. "Jan, you're so cynical and I worried so, but you will never believe me."

She really was strikingly beautiful, but then, so were all his mistresses. One could not be the greatest dress designer and fashion expert in the Empire and parade a mistress who was not exquisite.

"What happened?" It was Leonard, looking absurdly like a worried bloodhound. "What caused the crash? I thought those Orbit Liners were crash-proof or something."

"My dear fellow, it was terrible." He detached himself from Moirá and sat down. Someone placed a drink at his elbow. It was Coisine, a drink from the Rim somewhere, which he detested, but he sipped it almost without noticing. His mind went back. Everything had been so peaceful, soundless, somehow eternal, then that squat dark fellow had come in—

He began to tell them about it. "This man, a black alien fellow, simply walked in as if he was passing through—I think he came down from C deck. Before we realised that anything, but anything, was wrong, he drew a weapon and killed this passenger behind me. Someone at the back started firing at the alien and we all took cover under our seats like hunted animals while blue

bolts simply hissed backwards and forwards over our heads——”

His thin, high-pitched voice continued, but he was suddenly re-living the horror of it again. The dead man, sprawled in the lounge chair, his mouth wide in a soundless scream. The eyes open but showing only the whites. The taut fingers, fixed, but still clutching at the blackened hole in his chest.

He remembered the hissing crackle of discharge bolts, the screams of passengers, the shower of sparks as one of the bolts struck some vital part of the vessel's mechanism. He found himself clutching at his chair as he recalled how the vessel tilted and began to roll. There had been a whispering sound as the vessel touched the first fringes of the atmosphere, a whisper which rose to a frightening drumming shriek. It had got hot, frighteningly hot——

They said the emergency grav. motors had checked the descent in time, but he had no recollection of it. His next conscious memory was awakening in hospital.

“My love, you're all little beads of sweat. It must have been terrible for you.” Moira dabbed at his face with a scented transparent hanky.

De-Arva wished suddenly that Moira was really concerned about him. At the moment, of course, she really felt sorry. She took

Emozine to heighten her emotions, but once the drug wore off—— A calculating machine again, a female computer with exquisite features and a beautiful body who didn't give two damns if he lived or died. Anyone would do, providing the bank balance was high enough and the possessor free with it. All his mistresses were the same; come to that, most of his friends. Strange, he had never given a thought to it before, but it would be unusual. Someone to want him for himself, someone less exquisite, perhaps, but real, someone like—who? Who was it he was trying to think of? He shrugged, mentally. He was thinking like a plebeian. What did he care for any of the women he had known? You desired something, you bought it. It was as simple as that.

His manager came over, looking, as usual, as if he had washed in oil. “You should take a rest, Jan. Your creative faculties need time to convalesce—the shock, you know.”

“And he's been working too hard,” said Moira. “He needs rest so much. I shall go with him and nurse him.”

De-Arva rose. “The hell you will,” he said.

They looked at him open-mouthed, too surprised to speak.

De-Arva looked at them with sudden contempt. “You goddam bunch of parasites,” he said.

Moira began to cry. "You'll take that horrible Marella with you. I know it."

De-Arva faced them. "I'm going to the Cottage because I want to be alone, really alone, understand?" He went out.

The private flyer was a flashy, two-tone Robiomatic with a special boost-thrust which he was afraid to use. Excessive speeds frightened him. He sank into the special upholstery and punched the destination on the control panel. The motor was inaudible; only the faint whine of the repellers reached him as the machine lifted and soared upwards to air lane twelve.

He lay back, sucking a thin, specially-blended inhalant, with a feeling of exhaustion. Why had he spoken like that, used such expressions? He had behaved like some plebeian, a policeman, technician or common uncreative. It was distressing that the shock of the accident should have such reactions. What would his friends think? Not that he intended to apologise. A creative behaved as he chose, and eccentricity was the trade mark of his genius.

He leaned back, trying to relax, but somehow sleep evaded him. He clicked his tongue with annoyance and flicked the switch beside the video screen.

A newscast was in progress and the announcer's face was appropriately solemn. "Now that

the Security ban has been lifted on last week's Orbit Liner disaster, it may now be revealed that no less than eighteen people lost their lives, making it the greatest tragedy in the history of Orbital Transport. Among the victims were: Senator and Mrs. Cooley of Kansas, Earth; Lionel Steadwell, Empire Sports Champion, of Lugos II; David Conroy, sales representative, of New York, Earth; Arturo Lienz——"

De-Arva straightened. Conroy? Hadn't he heard that name on the liner? His head began to ache in a peculiar way, but for the moment he ignored it. Conroy? Heavens above, the alien on the liner. He had said something, shouted something, about Conroy before he fired. Something like: "This is it, Conroy."

De-Arva put his hands to his head and screamed. Suddenly he felt as if white-hot metal was burning into his head between his eyes. Blindly, he punched the emergency switch. "Emergency, I am ill, very ill, help me."

The emergency button would cancel the ship's flight pattern and an automatic alarm signal would continue to broadcast until the nearest air-control brought him down on a beam.

David Conroy, the man with the hole in his chest—— The pain increased suddenly and he fainted.

When he regained conscious-

ness, a big man in a white coat was bending over him. "How are you feeling?"

De-Arva put his hand to his head. "A little improvement, I think. It was my head."

"Yes, yes. We've checked you physically, Mr. De-Arva, but you're perfectly fit. We'll try a few psych. tests now. You were in a bad way." He reached for an obsolete contact cap. "This won't hurt you."

"No Robot-psych?"

The psychiatrist smiled. "You must understand this is a small community, Mr. De-Arva, one might almost say, a hick community. Tucked into a valley like we are, and being small, well, we just couldn't run to million-credit equipment like that. Of course, if you're at all nervous, we could have you flown to the nearest city."

"No, no. It was just unusual. One meets so few human psychiatrists these days. Deplorable, really; no touch of friendly understanding." He gave the psychiatrist the benefit of his most charming public smile.

The man placed the cap on De-Arva's head and flung switches. He stood with his back to the patient, taking notes.

Not even a robot-interpreter, thought De-Arva. Really, it was incredible right here on Earth. It might just as well be some

squalid, half-constructed city on one of the Rim planets.

The man closed his notebook with a snap. Curiously, his face had changed. It was pale under the tan and set in grim, determined lines. He crossed the room and said a few inaudible words into a wall speaker, then he turned to the bed. "I've sent for your clothes. When they come, get up and get out of here."

De-Arva stared at him, his mouth slightly open. "I am cured? So quickly?"

"Cured, hell! Nothing I have here would cure you, and there isn't a centre on Earth, that I know of, would risk trying. You've been psyched, mister. Someone put a block in your mind so that if you think about the wrong subject too long it triggers a pain centre."

"Psyched? You must be mistaken. I know nothing whatever about it. Nothing at all."

The psychiatrist frowned. "Maybe you do and maybe you don't. At the moment, I'm inclined to think you don't, but I can't take the risk. We're a peaceful community here. We mind our own business. I think even a big city centre would treat you the same way; they wouldn't want to be mixed up in one of those brewing Rim wars, either."

"Are you insane?" De-Arva's voice cracked with indignation. "I have never left the system in my

life, and only twice left Earth. Two visits to Mars, no more."

"Oh, sure, sure." The psychiatrist removed the contact cap and replaced it on the shelf.

"Don't you understand who I am?" De-Arva spluttered with sudden fury. "I am Jan De-Arva, *the* De-Arva. You can't treat me like this."

"I don't care if you're the Supreme Administrator. I don't care if you own my immortal soul." The psychiatrist turned his back and snapped off switches. "You've been psyched, mister, psyched so well that I don't think there's a legitimate institute on this planet which could break it down." He turned. "I should think about that, and hard. It means that some illicit group did the job, some group probably from one of the dominion worlds where they specialise in that sort of thing."

There was a click and a package dropped from the ejecter chute and into a metal basket.

The psychiatrist tossed the package on the bed. "Your clothes. You'll find your flyer on the roof park waiting for you. There's nothing to keep you in this town, nothing historical, nothing scenic, just don't hang around, huh?"

"You don't give me a chance, but not a chance." De-Arva's voice broke. "What can I do?"

There was a mixture of irrita-

tion and contempt on the other's face. "Maybe they did an erasure so that you don't remember."

"I don't truly——"

"Shut up. I'll give advice within safety limits. Listen. Whatever you think about, if it gives you a headache, forget it. That's why they put it there, to stop you getting interested in things they on't want you to."

"I was only listening to a news-cast and thinking——" De-Arva put his hands to his head and closed his eyes.

"You see what I mean now?"

De-Arva heard the voice dully through the pain and nodded weakly. "But why?" There were tears of fear and frustration in his eyes.

"I wouldn't know. I don't want to know. I can only guess. You saw that affair on the Orbit Liner. Could be that you saw, or heard, too much. If I get a probe and run off a truth statement, or bring a mech-hypno and get at facts that way, do you know what would happen? The same sort of thing that happened on the liner. Outworlders incinerating each other on street corners, innocent townspeople ice-gunned in side streets because they might know too much. I don't have the shoulders for that kind of responsibility, and I would be responsible if I pushed my nose in."

De-Arva rose and began to dress with trembling hands. "It's

insane, but insane. I am the world's foremost dress designer. Violence appals me. I love beautiful and exquisite things. I am an artist, a creative."

Sympathy struggled with determination on the other's face. When he spoke, his voice had a rough understanding. "I guess it's tough, but I can't help you. Listen, a psych-block is not the only thing they've done. There are a lot of neuro-adjustments as well which I don't even pretend to understand. I can only give you one word of advice; don't go running to the nearest robot-psych thinking it will clear everything up. They're not designed to handle complicated techniques of this kind. If you stick your skull into one of those things, it will blow the inside of your head like a duff fuse." The voice became harsh again. "Now get out of here, fast. The door on the left leads to the elevator."

"The Cottage" was built on a high cliff overlooking the sea. It in no way resembled its name. It was a bubble of glassine, silvex and shimmering, pale blue alloy, but De-Arva entered it with a feeling of relief. It was like returning from a business trip to a familiar city after a stay in some impossible and hostile planet.

He sank into the nearest chair and pressed the dispenser button for wine. The robot house control delivered the bottle—at the correct

temperature—poured it into glass on the table at his elbow.

Wearily, he pressed the audio button. There was a pick-up somewhere on the cliff face and it brought the sigh and suck of the sea into the room. He found it soothing. Sometimes, during storms, he would turn the switch to full and lie listening to the Pacific rollers crashing over the rocks and the high shriek of the wind. At such times he was seized with a primitive fear which was almost ecstasy. Some of his most famous creations had emerged from such savage symphonies. "Mode Gypsy," for example, a style which had swept at least twenty of the more advanced planets.

Elthaine had been his mistress at the time and she looked so well in it. She'd had one of those bright lipped, sexually arrogant faces and a kind of magnificent, full-breasted coarseness. In "Mode Gypsy" she had looked almost incredibly desirable and had ensured its success. He wondered vaguely what had happened to her.

"Just take it easy, Mr. De-Arva," said a harsh voice behind him. "Don't touch any buttons or anything and nobody will get hurt."

The speaker was a tall thin-faced youth with cold blue eyes. Behind him stood an obvious outworlder, a four-foot creature

with tremendous breadth of shoulder and thighs like tree trunks. His face was black, not the shiny black of a negro, but black with the unreflecting depths of soot. Something in his hand pointed steadily at De-Arva's head. "Just don't move." The voice was thick and grating, and the black eyes hard and expressionless.

Another voice spoke from outside the room. "The house is clean, no hook-ups, and there's not an agent within a thousand miles."

"Okay," the youth acknowledged. He looked down at De-Arva. "This is just a check. A Terran stole something on the liner. We're looking for it, checking every surviving passenger."

"Search if you want. I know nothing about it." De-Arva felt sweat gathering on his forehead.

The weapon in the black hand jerked close to his face. "Who are you?"

"I am Jan De-Arva, *the* Jan De-Arva. I was an innocent witness, no more."

The youth was studying a small instrument in his hand. He nodded to the outworlder. "The guy's speaking the truth; no fluctuation of any kind. I guess he is De-Arva." He looked down at the cringing man in the chair and grinned, twistedly. "That we should worry about you! My God, what a hair-do."

"You boys finished in there?" said the voice..

"Yeah, the guy's clean."

The black man came closer to De-Arva's chair. "We never came, see? You never saw us. You don't want ever to get hurt, do you?" The cold metal of the weapon touched De-Arva's cheek. "You remember that, eh?"

The youth grinned. "You needn't pile on the heavy stuff, Otto, the guy's nearly dead from fright already."

The outworlder nodded. "I take no chances. You talk, you die. You understand that, Daisy Chain?"

De-Arva was stung. "How dare you?" His voice became almost feminine with an indignation that almost overcame his fear. "I am an artist, I contribute something to the world. I have the right to express myself as I choose—"

"Shut the canary up," said the youth. "He worries me."

The outworlder smacked De-Arva's face heavily. "Stop screaming, little girl, and forget this, see?"

They left the room and he heard the door slide shut behind them.

Quite uninhibitedly, De-Arva began to cry. His shoulders shook and the tears rolled unrestrainedly down his cheeks. What had he done? So much in so short a time. It was some monstrous quirk of fate, unjustified. He was filled with

a sudden fury against the out-worlder. A stinking, plebeian Rim lout, daring to smack De-Arva's face. He would have liked to snatch the ice gun from the fellow's hand, flick the adjuster switch to "jolt" and knock the squat man's teeth clean down his throat.

De-Arva went suddenly cold inside. How did he know the weapon was an ice gun? He did not know one weapon from another. He had never even suspected that such weapons had an adjustment switch, yet he *knew* it was an ice gun. He *knew* it had an adjustment switch, "jolt," "knock-out" and "lethal." How did he know?

He put his hands over his eyes and shuddered. How much could he take? What would be happening to his creative faculties under this kind of pressure? What was the matter with the "Cottage," too? The most expensive vocal locks and those men had walked in as if they owned the house.

Daisy Chain! He felt his face turn hot with fury—Daisy Chain! He should have had someone here to take care of men like that; there might be other situations—What he needed was a bodyguard, yes, that was the answer, a bodyguard. In these troubled days there were a number of accredited organisations who hired out trained personnel for protection purposes.

He pressed the Comvid button beside him and asked for "Information."

The young man from the Protective Association proved to be a pleasant surprise. He was conservatively dressed, quietly spoken and obviously a man of some culture.

De-Arva checked his credentials with the Association, gave him an outline of what had occurred, and relaxed a little. "I hope we shall get on, Mr. Preston."

"I hope so, too, sir. Mind if I look around?"

"Look around? Oh, you mean check the Cottage—by all means."

Preston left the room and returned, half an hour later, so quietly that De-Arva jumped. "Something wrong?"

"Nothing, immediately, sir. I notice, however, that the doors have vocal locks."

"I was assured they are almost unbreakable."

"They are for the common criminal. Unfortunately, from what you have told me, we are not dealing with common criminals. These men have the resources of, perhaps, two or three planets behind them. A vocal lock can be keyed and tripped by a pocket sonar if you know how. I suggest contact locks, keyed to your personality characteristics, touch of a finger tip, your finger tip only."

De-Arva made a helpless gesture with a loose white hand. "You will attend to it, Preston."

"Certainly. I will order immediately. In the meantime, a few detectors in the grounds, perhaps?"

"Detectors? You think these men will be back?"

"It is possible, sir."

De-Arva paled suddenly. "What sort of detectors? Do you mean for explosives?"

"No point in taking unnecessary chances, sir."

"But they wouldn't dare. This is Earth, *Earth*, not some rough barbarian Rim planet."

"I'm afraid the Rim planets have little respect for Earth. They think she is effete, they regard it an insult that she should rule the Empire. Hence the various intrigues and vendettas constantly taking place."

"I don't wish to know about it." De-Arva's voice was petulant. "I am an innocent, universally respected creative, embroiled in this horrible business through no fault of my own."

Preston shrugged, almost imperceptibly. "As you wish, but I am employed to protect you. About the detectors, sir?"

"Do as you see fit." De-Arva made a gesture of irritation. "But kindly leave me in ignorance of your precautionary measures. I find them disturbing."

Preston bowed stiffly and withdrew.

For two days there was peace and De-Arva's self-confidence slowly returned, but in the middle of the night, his sleep was disturbed.

"I am sorry to awaken you." Preston was a quiet, alert figure beside the bed. "We must leave immediately."

"Leave! Leave! Why in heaven should we?"

"Because they're wise. Because your life is in danger and I am employed to protect it. Here, it will be impossible. Please hurry; we have, at most, thirty minutes."

Frightened by Preston's urgency, De-Arva rose and began to dress with trembling fingers. "But this is insane, literally persecution, and I have done nothing—nothing." He said, with sudden suspicion: "How do you know all this?"

"I have a special receiver, sir. Please hurry." He moved slightly towards the door with a touch of impatience. "That two-tone flyer of yours is going to stand out like a sore thumb. We'll use it only to the nearest airfield and take a local from there."

On the ship, Preston subjected every passenger to a casual but searching scrutiny. "We're clear, I think. I've booked the whole run but we may have to jump off at an intermediate stop."

De-Arva stared in front of him,

conscious of a nervous tic near the corner of his mouth. "I don't understand it. How do you know so much?"

"When the Association accepts a client for protection, it appoints one man as bodyguard, but the whole organisation works to ensure that the client stays in one piece. They're keeping me informed."

"But I've *done* nothing." De-Arva's voice cracked. "These horrible aliens persecuting me, for what?"

"It's not personal spite. They have reasons for believing you're hiding something they want badly, and, incidentally, they're not aliens, they're men."

"Not aliens? But some of them are only four feet tall, black skinned——"

"True, but they came originally from Earth during the expansion. One and a half gravities, a C type sun and a harsher atmosphere can bring about a lot of changes in seven or eight generations. We haven't met any aliens in our stellar colonisation—yet."

De-Arva shivered. "They're aliens to me. Those black fellows and the thin ones with green skins——"

Preston paid no attention; he was frowning in concentration and obviously listening to something else. "I'm sorry, sir, the organisation thinks they have us spotted. We'll have to find a change of

transport at the next stop. We have a sub-office there, so we can get extra help."

The next stop was one of those small indeterminate airports which seem to dot the Middle West. It was poorly lit and the local Weather Control was putting down its nightly dust-laying rain. A thin cold drizzle whipped their faces as they stepped from the landing shelter.

Preston took De-Arva's arm in a firm grip and strode swiftly towards the robotaxi rank near the edge of the field.

Fifty yards from the nearest taxi, two figures drifted out of the shadows and stood in their path.

Preston pushed De-Arva to one side and crouched. There was something in his hand that gleamed, but his movements had been so incredibly swift that De-Arva had not seen him draw it.

The two figures broke, ran in different directions. The weapon in Preston's hand stabbed brief yellow light and one of the running figures exploded wetly in a sharp puff of luminous vapour. The other figure turned, fired once and raced behind an equipment store.

Preston, panting, pushed the other towards the nearest taxi. "Get in there, keep low, don't show your head."

De Arva tried not to look at the

thing beside the taxi. It was something cindered, still smoking faintly. Beside the door was a neatly shod foot—a foot without a leg.

Preston pushed plasticredits into the meter and said: "East and Tenth," into the destination pick-up.

The receptor whispered softly, relays clicked and the repellers beneath the taxi began to whine as they built up power. Slowly, the taxi rose, levelled off in the robot air lane and darted towards the east.

Preston put the gun away, found and lit a cigarette with one hand and inhaled deeply. "There's another taxi rank at East and Tenth. Get in the first and take it to the roof of Allied Chemicals. There'll be four or five of the Association waiting to take care of you."

"Aren't you staying with me?" De-Arva's voice was fearful.

"Sorry, no. By that time I shall not be fully competent."

De-Arva noticed, for the first time, that the other's face was pale and beaded with sweat. The back of one hand was bleeding slightly from a long, shallow gash. "Surely a superficial wound like that—" He stopped. Even to him, his protests sounded too self-centred. "I am sorry. I am being selfish; your hand needs treatment, of course."

Preston smiled, twistedly. "Sorry, this is the end of the line

for me. Those boys don't use weapons that just wound. That guy lost his head; they wanted us alive. I guess that guy got rattled when I hit his buddy. A heat shell is kind of unnerving."

"But your organisation—a doctor—" De-Arva made frantic, ineffectual gestures.

"Listen, brother." Preston's voice was thick and distorted. "That guy hit me with a fungus pellet which is a virulent parasite from Lugos II and in ten minutes my skin will start peeling. A fungus pellet—" He coughed, raspingly, "—reduces a man to an advanced stage of decomposition while he's still alive. Thank God they give us pills just in case." He put something in his mouth and swallowed. "I wouldn't want to be around when it starts. I could sit here and watch myself rot—" The voice trailed away.

De-Arva crouched in the corner seat, shivering. He wished he could scream, but there seemed to be ice in his throat. Wasn't the taxi ever going to reach East and Tenth?

The dying man was already semi-conscious and babbling insanely to himself. "Crazy idea—maybe it'll work—maybe. God-dam finger bones didn't cremate—tripped up there— Poor old De-Arva—deader'n'a duck—dead—cremated."

De-Arva's nerve cracked. "I'm not dead—I'm here, *here*." He

reached out to shake the dying man and then recoiled.

Preston's face was already a bluish yellow and the eyes sightless. "De-Arva is dead," he said clearly. "Oh, Betty, honey, remember—" His head fell forward and he was suddenly still.

"East and Tenth," said the speaker in the taxi. The door slid open and De-Arva leapt out and ran, stumbling, away.

The robotaxi stood still, its door open, waiting for the remaining passenger to alight. "This is your destination," the speaker was saying. "This is East and Tenth, your destination." After a time it would say: "Are you feeling unwell? If so, please press the red emergency button and a doctor will come." It would repeat the words four times, then an automatic alarm would cut in, notifying the police and the nearest medical centre.

There were three quiet men waiting on the roof of Allied Chemicals. They crowded him silently through the door and into the elevator. He never felt the needle prick his hand, and had only a dim recollection of someone catching him as he fell.

When he regained consciousness, he was in an expensive, well-furnished apartment, alone. He stirred wearily in the sleep-chair and pressed the button to bring

himself to a sitting position. The drug had left no after-effects and his head was quite clear.

His thoughts returned to Preston's dying words: "De-Arva is dead." It was ridiculous, of course, the ramblings of a dying man. De-Arva looked at his left hand. As a young man he had lost the little finger in an accident. Surgogenetics could grow him new flesh but artificial bone structure was still employed. What had they called it? Ah, yes, Plastofibrisine—and Plastofibrisine, he knew, didn't burn.

Preston's dying words struck him with renewed force. "Goddam finger bones didn't cremate."

De-Arva felt cold inside. It was quite insane, of course, but somehow, somewhere, there seemed to be an evasive grain of truth. The most logical explanation, of course, was that Preston was delirious and slightly insane. On the other hand, he, De-Arva, might be insane. He had never heard of a science able to switch identities. Such conclusions were sheer fantasy. Nevertheless, the finger bones still worried him. How had they *known*? His thoughts seemed to race in circles until, finally, he had to meet the question he had been trying to avoid. If De-Arva *was* dead, who the hell was *he*? He screamed.

There was still sweat on his face when a thin-faced man came silently into the room. "The boss

will see you now." He indicated the door.

De-Arva rose unsteadily and followed him.

There was a big man sitting at a table, playing an old-fashioned game of card patience. The hair was greying and the face would have been gross but for the brilliant intelligent eyes. He indicated a chair without looking up. "Sit down, De-Arva." He laid one card carefully on another and clicked his tongue in annoyance. "Didn't you hear me? I said, sit down."

De-Arva sat. There was something about the man.

"My name is, at the moment, Robinson. I'm a psychiatrist, also I run this sector." He looked up. "You don't understand a word I'm saying, do you? You will; that's what I'm here for, to help you adjust—the change-over may be rough. Cigarette? Cigar? Inhalant? Drink?"

"I have my own brand of inhalants; they are specially blended," said De-Arva with an attempt at dignity. He fumbled for his inhalant case and removed the crystal-filled tube with trembling fingers.

"Horrible things," said Robinson, disinterestedly. "Effete, decadent." He tossed a queen onto a row and said: "Jackpot— As I was saying, a decadent habit. A lot of outworlds consider Earth

decadent, too weak to rule, incapable of framing a sensible policy. But Earth is old and wise, very wise." He began to lay out the cards once more. "A lot of outworlds consider that they ought to rule, or perhaps they're strong enough to push around a couple of neighbouring planets. Earth doesn't like that; maintain the status quo, preserve the Empire at all costs and she has good sound reasons."

"I paid good money for protection," said De-Arva coldly, "not for a lesson in Empire history. Further, you are treating me like a prisoner."

Robinson fumbled in his pockets, found a pipe and slowly began to load it. "History won't hurt you, and you are a prisoner, okay?"

"I shall not authorise a single cheque to be met," said De-Arva shrilly. "I demand to be released immediately, but immediately."

Robinson pointed with the stem of his pipe. "That's the door; the elevator faces you when you open it. All the trigger men, turning this town upside down trying to find you, will welcome your appearance with open arms."

De-Arva felt sweat stand out in little beads on his forehead. He didn't move.

Robinson lit his pipe and watched the blue smoke rise towards the ceiling. "Now we'll

continue with the history lesson. As I was saying, the status quo must be maintained at all costs. When you have forty or fifty occupied worlds and one or two get big ideas about pushing around some of the others—things get tough. It's like cells in a growing life-form. If one runs amok you've got a cancer on your hands. This is the same sort of thing—a stellar cancer. The possibility of such a situation was foreseen as far back as the occupation of Mars, and steps were taken to deal with it."

"I fail to see why you are telling me all this," said De-Arva coldly.

Robinson laid a card on a row and shook his head absently. "It won't mean a thing to you now, De-Arva, but it's very necessary you should know. You've got to have a background to make the change-over. You'll learn why in time."

"It is obvious I have no choice."

Robinson grinned. "That's right, you've got to listen. As I said earlier, Earth is very wise; she's been around longer than the out-worlds and foresaw the danger. She could have maintained a colossal fleet and kept things in line the hard way, a way that wouldn't last. Sooner or later a couple or three planets would have formed an alliance and three small fleets might have been

bigger than one large one. Then you've got a show-down or a war. No, it was easier to form an intelligence service, anonymous, subtle and well organised, with agents in unobtrusive positions on all the occupied worlds."

"I don't see why we couldn't mind our own business," said De-Arva with sudden irritation. "If the outworlds want to fight among themselves, let them."

"How long could Earth stay out? A month? A year? We're the hub, the centre, a key position. No, we had to do something for our own safety. Worlds don't get big ideas by themselves; someone at the top has to get them first and then start working downwards so that the ordinary people get to think the same way. Sometimes it's one man, sometimes a group, and agents were dotted around to keep tabs on that kind of thing. Earth had the backing of at least twenty dominion worlds in due course and that put her technically ahead of any upstart Rim planet. When a guy, or group of guys, looked like instigating a dangerous policy, the organisation stepped in quickly."

"Was there no protest?" De-Arva was interested despite himself.

Robinson knocked the ash out of his pipe and began to pick up his cards again. "Accidents do happen," he said drily.

De-Arva paled. "They—they were killed?"

"Let us say they were unfortunate. They contracted unspecified complaints, their private ships developed faults just before landing, or some fanatic tossed a solar grenade at a mass meeting."

"But that's murder." De-Arva was on his feet. "You're nothing but a bunch of political hatchet men, assassins——"

"That's right." Robinson's expression did not change. "We're no good, we're a murder organisation. We've used assassination, blackmail, graft, sex, exploitation, ransom, all the dirty tricks in the book and a few new ideas we've thought up for ourselves, but the Empire is still at peace."

"It's monstrous, an abomination." De-Arva's voice climbed the scale. "It should be exposed."

"Can you think of anything better?" Robinson sounded bored. "We rub out one tin-pot dictator who might have sacrificed a billion lives to achieve his crazy ambitions. If you can find a better solution, tell us. We'd like to know about it."

De-Arva sat down slowly. There did not seem anything left to say.

"Of course," continued Robinson, cutting and re-cutting his cards carefully, "such methods cannot be continued indefinitely. Astute people start asking questions, mathematicians start putting two and two together and

getting four. Outworlds began forming their own counter-organisations, and have been combing the Empire for years. They know about us, but can't pin down a control unit. Occasionally they knock off some of our men, often we knock off some of theirs, but for us the going got harder as the years passed. It became more and more difficult to smack down some loud-mouth who wanted a new order and was quite prepared to sacrifice a few million lives to get it. Further, we were getting tired of killing, not for ethical but political reasons. If the outworlds ever did succeed in proving our organisation was responsible and making it stick—wham! Goodbye Empire."

Robinson extracted a cigar from a case on the table and lit it thoughtfully. "We had to cook up new methods and, more important, a new weapon. The 'brains' at headquarters worked six years on getting an idea, and it took them another eight to make it work. When, finally, they began to perfect the finished article, the Rim worlds got wind of it and we had to keep shifting it from hide-out to hide-out with a lot of trigger-happy boys on our heels the whole time. When, at last, we got the job done, we had to wait for it to mature. We were shifting the weapon to the final hide-out when the Rim boys caught up with us."

He blew a smoke ring and watched it absently. "We think their trigger men misinterpreted their orders because they wanted our man alive. They thought he was carrying the plans of the weapon, if not on his person, in his mind. As it was, shooting started, but we got our man away with one of the cleverest gimmicks in the history of the organisation. Too bad we slipped up on an unforeseen, million-to-one chance, but even then we bought ourselves time to complete our work."

Robinson paused and glanced at his watch. "Guess I've lectured long enough. We've got to remove that block." He pressed a wall button and a white-coated man came silently into the room. "Get this bird trussed, Ed."

De-Arva rose. "You cannot——"

"Shut up," Robinson said sharply. He turned to the white-coated man. "Oh, and Ed, ask Bannion to do something about the voice. This goddam petulant falsetto is getting in my hair."

De-Arva tried to run, but the white-coated man was already at his side. Something pricked his hand and there was no time, even to scream, before the ceiling seemed to fall in on his head.

When he regained consciousness, he was in the same sleep-

chair as before and he felt refreshed.

Robinson was sitting opposite him, drawing on his pipe. "Awake, are you? About time. No change, is there? You thought there might be. There isn't. This is the tough part, however; it mustn't be too fast, or too slow, but just right. Any comments on our history lesson?"

De-Arva pressed the button and brought the sleep-chair to the "sit" position. "I want no part of your organisation." He was surprised to find his voice strangely deep. "You're nothing but a collection of gunmen, and you seem to have a war on your hands, despite your noble claims to the maintenance of peace."

Robinson grinned. "Only a little one. A few trained guys who shoot each other on sight if, and when, they meet. Maybe it gets to a shooting match occasionally and, maybe, here and there, a few innocent citizens get rubbed out by outworlders because they're suspect. It could have been whole populations just erased, planets cindered—take your choice."

De-Arva shrugged. "All this is immaterial. I have no part in it. I am a widely respected creative who——"

"Yeah, sure, we know—— Catch!" Robinson tossed something towards him that gleamed.

De-Arva caught it with a deftness that surprised him. He

recognised it only as some sort of weapon, but the feel of it in his hand was horrifyingly familiar. He flicked off the safety catch with his thumb, spun the setting mechanism expertly with his index finger and squeezed the firing stud.

Robinson laughed softly and knocked the weapon deftly out of his hand. "It's not loaded. I'm not quite a fool." He leaned forward. "It felt familiar, didn't it? Too familiar; the whole operation seemed almost instinctive." He retrieved the weapon from the floor and put it in his pocket. "No doubt you design a swell sexy ensemble for the girl friend, but you do our job so much better, De-Arva, so very much better. You'd be surprised if I told you the rating the outworlders give you. I don't think there is a man among them who would risk trying to take you from the front. You're fast, very fast——"

De-Arva put his hands over his face. "I know nothing about weapons—I can't do. It was an ice gun, wasn't it? Works on a principle of beamed sonics which are keyed to the nervous system."

"Yeah, at half power it seems to freeze the recipient, hence the name. Three quarter power renders the victim unconscious, and at full power . . ." Robinson spread his hands, ". . . next of kin are informed as soon as possible."

"It is a trick, some new hypno technique."

Robinson shook his head. "Sorry. You'd better hear the rest of the story." He held out a photograph. "Know who this is?"

"It's a little like myself—I don't know."

"It doesn't matter now, but it matters a lot when you have to rub out a guy in a hurry. An outworlder came down from C deck with orders to bump off a guy he'd seen only in a photograph. This guy was rated as a dangerous character; further, agents always work in pairs. He was a trained killer himself, this outworlder, but he made one fatal mistake—— He shot the wrong man. He never got time to rectify the error because a shooting match developed with the other agent and something vital got hit on the ship.

"Our surviving agent sent out an alarm call and we got our man away in an ambulance. As ours was the first ambulance on the scene, we had to take a few casualties as well, including one corpse—yours."

De-Arva half rose. "Mine! You're speaking in insane riddles."

"Am I now? We had a guy with a hole in his chest which went right through to his spine. His name was Jan De-Arva. Want to argue about it?" Robinson shook his head slowly. "Why

don't you just keep quiet and let me tell it my way?"

De-Arva made a gesture of resignation. "As you please."

"Good." Robinson pressed a wall stud and drew up his chair as a table-shelf slid out sideways. "I explain things better with a deck of cards in my hand." He grinned. "Maybe it's a fixation, huh?" He began to lay out the cards. "Two centuries ago a guy discovered a drug called Threllopine which had a peculiar effect if injected into the pre-frontal lobes of the brain. It not only blocks a man's memory, but temporarily erases his character completely. A guy with a shot of Threllopine in his brain would have to be fed, washed, even have to be given pre-digested food, because he wouldn't know he had to chew it first. He would be like an infant, his mind would be a complete blank, but, and this is important, a receptive blank. Guys have been psyched under Threllopine, psyched and turned loose with triggered directive which couldn't be detected by normal examination. You can also run a whole series of impressions from one brain to another if the recipient is Threllopine blanked.

"In case it's difficult to grasp, consider a valuable painting which some crook knocks off from an art gallery. The crook knows a buyer, but the painting is big and he's got to get past a cordon of

alert coppers and customs men who happen to be looking for it. Know how he does it? He paints an inferior landscape over the original and walks through the cordon openly with the picture under his arm. Centuries ago that gag, with variations, was worked countless times. When the crook gets to the buyer he erases the inferior landscape and the masterpiece is revealed beneath—make sense?

"We had a problem like that. We had our agent, Conroy—the masterpiece—alive. We had the dead man, De-Arva, who bore quite a resemblance to Conroy. We punched Conroy's head full of Threllopine, neuro-activated De-Arva's brain and fed all his memories and sense-impressions into the receptive blank of Conroy's."

"I—I am Conroy?" De-Arva's voice was a croak.

"You are, and it worked even better than we hoped. When Conroy walked out of hospital, he not only behaved and acted like De-Arva, he believed he was De-Arva. We employ the best people in the business and surgo-genetics performed miracles with his face and appearance. The psych boys, too, thought of everything. They put in a pain trigger to stop Conroy thinking about himself—might have counteracted the drug too soon and caused schizoid aberrations later. They

even inscribed a directive for Conroy to choose the correct Protective Association if he, as De-Arva, got into a tight spot. That particular association was, of course, a front for one of our sector control units.

"Conroy was helped into the ambulance in full view of three outworld agents who were hanging around just in case, and resumed De-Arva's life where it had left off. Even when the outworlders checked him later with a pocket lie-detector they got a negative reading. Conroy said, from conscious memory, that he was De-Arva, and a pocket detector only reacts to conscious memory. Too bad we slipped up on one tiny item we knew nothing about."

"The finger bones?"

"Yeah. The outworlders hung about the crematorium; they're persistent those guys, and suspicious. They wanted to make quite sure that Conroy really was a handful of ash before they went chasing elsewhere. Unfortunately, the janitor found the finger bones in the furnace, mentioned it casually in a bar and was overheard by the wrong guy. All they had to do then was to trace the medical history of the accident victims and add up the rest for themselves."

Conroy rose and began to pace up and down. "Perhaps all you say is true, perhaps I am Conroy,

but I still think, and feel, like De-Arva."

"You can't rush things. The personalities will mesh in slowly as the drug wears off, hence the history lesson. If you'd had dreams, or sudden memories of your past life, you could have gone mad without some sane background for reference."

"So I'm a paid murderer, a semi-legal assassin paid by an astute government who disclaims all knowledge of my existence. Under what anonymous heading are we subsidised? Empire Morticians? Refuse Disposal? I'm not sure I wouldn't prefer to remain De-Arva."

Robinson picked up his cards and began to lay them out again carefully. "Face it, boy, and you should know better than I. De-Arva was a vain, effeminate little pip squeak. He bought, and paraded, a lot of glamorous dames which he hadn't the personality to make the hard way. To be kind, he had a lot of talent and a flair for showmanship. Apart from that——" Robinson shrugged meaningly.

Conroy said bitterly: "Possibly I am over-sensitive, but I detect certain moral differences between a pip squeak and a hatchet man."

"It doesn't mean a thing that a two-bit paranoic can whip up enough public hatred to start a war? That hundreds of thousands of women and kids will die be-

cause of it, you'd rather remain a pip squeak. My God, Conroy, do you think that's all?" Robinson's face was flushed. "Take a look at this, tell me what you make of it." He flung something angrily on the table.

Conroy picked up the photograph, wearily, and studied it. "It looks like some sort of spaceship."

"That's what we think it is."

"You mean it's alien, something that doesn't come from our worlds at all?"

"We couldn't be lucky for ever, could we? We've kept pushing out, taking over habitable worlds; sooner or later we had to meet up with intelligent life. These things have been spotted in increasing numbers by survey ships going out beyond the Rim. Maybe we've met up with a life form that doesn't like the idea of another race in the galaxy, or perhaps they're expanding, too. If it ever came to a show-down, what sort of defence could the Empire put up if it was divided against itself?"

Conroy said coldly: "Any tool will suit to justify an assassin."

Robinson swept his cards suddenly and angrily to the floor. "My God, do you think we *like* being hatchet men? Do you think we don't realise it's an admission of failure? An admission that men have yet to learn to live together under a true ethical and moral

code. As it stands, they can't, so someone has to do the job by force, and it happens to be us." He bent down and began to pick up the cards. "Sorry, I'm getting tired and irritable. It's about time you had some more sleep as well. Will you take a pill or do I have to send for Ed?"

He slept. It was not a pleasant sleep—he dreamed. Moira was on a balcony, Moira, exquisite, wafting her musky, aphrodisiac perfume as she moved. She smiled and stepped towards the telemikes. He shouted: "Don't speak, for God's sake, don't speak——"

He awoke shivering and drenched with sweat. He remembered, remembered too well. He remembered Igor, The Liberator, stepping forward on the balcony smiling—smiling, knowing that he was going to make war. An undeclared war with a fleet big enough to cinder a whole planet. He must have been very confident of his safety, the guards lining the streets, the building guarded by robotic traps, an air umbrella of grav discs above and the scintillating force screen in front of him.

Conroy grinned to himself, savagely and without humour. It had been a neat job, really. Thirty minutes work with one of the telemikes Igor would use, two days before the speech. It had been an adaption of the vocal lock and a tiny energy pill, no

bigger than the head of a pin. Igor's secret police and techs made tests, of course, beamed sound and vision without result. The mechanisms would only react to the dictator's own voice.

Igor had stepped forward, one arm raised impressively, and said two words. Two words had been enough. There had been a single, eye-searing flash——

It had not been pretty. Igor was still standing after the explosion, one hand still raised, but three quarters of his face had been missing. It seemed a long time before the blackened figure tottered and fell from sight.

Conroy leaned over the edge of the sleep-chair and vomited.

The change over took eight days. At times he was confident, hard speaking and lithe of movement. Ten minutes later he would be wringing his hands and sobbing, protesting that he was a creative.

And the dreams. Dreams in which he was endlessly pursued. Dreams of narrow streets on strange worlds and the blue-white flashes of energy guns. A recurring dream of a man contorted by a direct hit, his whole body swathed in vapour, his screams echoing down the empty street. Conroy screamed with him, screamed and screamed.

"It's taken you a long time." Robinson looked at the pale face before him. "Once or twice we

wondered if you were going to make it. I'm sorry, Conroy, it's been tough for you."

Conroy looked at him and through him. "I do a dirty job, but there's nothing in the regulations which says I have to like it."

"You did it extremely well, however."

"A little pip squeak, talented with an energy gun and with a flair for assassination."

Robinson had the grace to wince. "Look, Dave, I only take orders, like you."

"Let's hear them." Conroy's voice was crisp and cold.

Robinson waved him to a chair. "You'd better sit down; this may take a little time." He picked up the inevitable deck of cards and began to lay them out. "Ever considered authority? A man comes, shall we say, out of the space service, used to giving orders and having them obeyed. In civilian clothes, he may still order people around, occasionally without effect, but quite often with very great effect. A man has, even without his uniform, an aura of authority. What is it? Can you define it? A projection of personality? Hypnosis? What? Another man can hold an audience, a second has real sales ability, a third can inspire faith, and a fourth induce fear. Ask yourself the same question—projection of personality? Hypnosis? What? The psychs wanted to know the

answer to those questions, too. It took them a few years, but they managed it in the end. They pin-pointed the area of human brain responsible and began to experiment. In the meantime, another group started a programme of deep research into the psychology of fear. They arrived, finally, not only with a new conception of the problem, but, if I can express it that way, a new type of fear. A fear that seemed logical to the victim—fear is, strictly speaking, illogical, because it is emotional—and fear is also infectious. The psychs cooked up what might be termed a fear projector. A fear that can't be erased by any technique yet known, a fear which goes so deep it becomes part of the personality, something greater than conscience."

"So, instead of shooting them down, we scare them to death?" Conroy's voice was bitter.

"One difference, this weapon doesn't kill. It projects a powerful fear psychosis which acts as a restraint on the recipients."

Conroy lit a cigarette and exhaled smoke. His eyes were cold and his mouth bitter. "So the brain boys cook up a new weapon, commit the details of it to my brain, because they're too scared to commit it to recorders, micro-tapes or anything else, and let me run the gauntlet with it back to base. Now, I suppose, they

have the effrontery to order me to use it for them."

Robinson pushed the cards carefully to one side. His eyes seemed to be experiencing some difficulty in meeting Conroy's. "They don't have any choice. You *are* the weapon."

Conroy's cigarette slipped from his fingers and to the floor. He bent to retrieve it. "Do go on," he said. His voice was icy.

"They made literally millions of tests." Robinson's words stumbled a little. "Yours was the only brain that lent itself fully to the experiment. We found out why you projected a limited amount of fear in a tough spot. It accounted for your—er—phenomenal success. Trigger men got scared of you, lost confidence. As a weapon, you cannot be duplicated, but after briefing you will realise you must never permit yourself to be identified as the weapon. The cause of the fear must always be referred, by you, to something else—a super weapon."

"I can't use it on you, I suppose?"

"Afraid not; we took care of that."

Conroy said, in a tight voice: "A pity."

Robinson shifted uncomfortably. "I know you've been through the hell of a lot, Dave, but don't take it out on me."

"After briefing, what?" Conroy's face was still cold.

"You just go out of that door, wander down the street and let their goons pick you up. They won't fry you on sight; they want you alive. They think you've got the secret of Earth's new super weapon inside your head."

Conroy slid his hand inside his coat. "Where's my gun? Just in case."

"Sorry, no gun, part of the plan. The killing is over."

"I don't feel dressed without a gun."

"No?" Robinson's voice held a suggestion of relieved, but friendly, triumph. "Weren't you developing ethics or something?"

"You damned rat," Conroy said furiously. Then, for the first time for many weeks, he grinned. "You win, you always do."

"Shall we call it a complete cure?"

"Call it a cure." Conroy held out his hand.

Anthos was worried. He was a tall, thin, dark-haired man with high cheek bones and a green skin. He stabbed a switch. "Number twelve."

"Sir?"

"Are you clear down there? No set-ups for force screens to seal off streets?"

"Nothing, sir. Everything seems normal."

Anthos scowled and tried another switch. "Number twenty, double your patrols round the ship hide-out; better switch in two more probes, too. Are you sure you're not covered? No high frequency probe rays? No innocent-looking craft casually passing over?"

"Haven't seen a ship in five days, sir. All the probe reactors are negative."

"Good," he said, and broke the connection. But it wasn't good, there was something decidedly wrong somewhere. An agent of Conroy's importance and calibre was not picked up with such ease unless there was a trap somewhere, especially after the chase they'd had at first. The man was even unarmed. It just didn't make sense.

Anthos had a vast and withering contempt for Earth, but her intelligence organisation was another thing. The most fatal mistake possible was to underestimate the organisation opposed to him, and Conroy looked too much like a piece of cheese in a trap.

Anthos pressed the button by the door and passed into the next room. "You've given us a lot of trouble, Conroy. Too much. Now you're working on some sort of gag. Why no gun?"

Conroy looked up from the comfortable chair. "No gag; we're not using guns any more. Earth has a super weapon."

"Don't make me laugh. If Earth had a super weapon she'd be showing it all over the Empire to scare the pants off the neutrals."

Conroy shrugged. "You please yourself what you believe. It's your neck, not mine."

The black eyes in the green face narrowed unpleasantly. "Don't come that stuff here, Conroy. We're taking you back to Colthis and let our own psychs loose on you. We know your people committed something, probably the plan of a weapon, to your mind, but ours will find it, believe me. They'll squeeze it out of your head somehow, although it may hurt a little. I'm told our newest techniques leave a man a mindless idiot, but they get everything. If you've got something in your mind, our psychs will get it out, make no mistake about that."

Conroy smiled a little, stretched and, very deliberately, flicked the butt of his cigarette onto the opposite chair.

"Why you damned Earth pig." The green-skinned man pressed a wall button. "You don't think you're going to get away with that, do you? We've got techniques that don't leave a mark. Otto will love working you over."

A black-skinned man came in. "Sir?"

"A friend of yours, Otto. Work him over, but good."

Conroy said: "Well, well, if it isn't daisy chain."

The black man scowled. "I'll make you scream like a little girl, funny man."

"When you start," said Conroy, "certain people will know. They'll punch a couple of buttons maybe and——"

Otto took a step forward. "Who yar trying to kid, mug?"

Conroy looked at him. "You asked for it."

Otto scowled, took a few uncertain steps, hesitated, looked worriedly at Anthos. "I think they *have* got a weapon, boss." He sat down heavily on the nearest chair. "I feel kind of sick. For God's sake stop looking at me like that, Mr. Conroy. Get them to turn it off—I'll do anything." He began to blubber.

Anthos lit a thin black cigar with a hand that shook. The trap was visible now. Earth had some sort of remote control weapon which she intended to try out on some human guinea pigs first. What better guinea pigs could she find than a group of illegal outworld agents? "I don't suppose it's any good asking you to make it quick, Conroy?"

"Oh, we don't intend to kill you. I want you to take me back to Colthis as you intended. I want to meet your leader, tell him about the weapon. Earth doesn't want war, you know, and a talk

might avert one. Don't get ideas on the journey, Anthos, will you? The weapon's range is limitless." Conroy looked at him.

Anthos sat down because his legs would no longer support him. Earth *had* a weapon. He knew it. He knew that if he ever tried to attack other peoples of the Empire he would die horribly. It would take a very long time and he would be hideously alone. With an effort he restrained a scream, but was unable to stop his limbs trembling. "Yes, Mr. Conroy," he said shakily, "yes, I will do as you say."

"Well?" said Robinson.

"The Godhead of Liberation and I," said Conroy, "had a heart to heart talk. He has decided not to go to war. When I left him, he was biting his nails down to his wrists in fear that we might use the weapon because he'd even considered it." He sat down heavily. "I'm not sure I wouldn't rather use a gun; it's cleaner. All these people become shivering neurotics. It isn't pretty."

"Only when they start thinking something they shouldn't," said Robinson easily. "Things like breaking up the Empire and attacking their neighbours." He grinned. "Don't start getting ethics again; you're due for nine months furlough and your wife is waiting."

"Wife?" Conroy sprang to his feet. "What wife?"

"Did the psychs forget to fix that? Careless of them. We must get that done immediately; removal of the block won't take twenty minutes, then you'll remember."

"You forgot, too, no doubt."

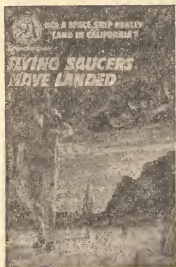
Robinson waved a negligent hand. "Can't have you boys worry about your wives, or your wives worry about you, come to that. She's been to sleep for a couple of years—cataleptic sanatorium." He was suddenly serious. "She might have eaten her heart out for you, Dave, and not knowing—we do try to spare suffering sometimes."

Conroy ceased to listen. A wife, someone to love him for himself. Is that why he had tried to think of a name?

Robinson was still talking. "When you get back, there's some trouble in sector fifty-nine, a couple of guys dreaming Napoleonic dreams——"

Conroy was feeling a warmth creep slowly through him. Someone who loved him for himself. He'd had a cold, bitter feeling that he was going to be rather lonely; there had even been a certain restraint among his friends, since his return. After all, no one would go out of their way to be friendly with the deadliest weapon in the Empire.

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THE HONEST PHILOSOPHER

by NIGEL LLOYD

*DOC WAS A MAN WITH HIS OWN WAY OF LIFE,
A WAY HE HAD TAUGHT SAMMY, AND WHEN
THE BIG CHANCE CAME SAMMY KNEW WHAT TO
ASK FOR. BUT DOC HAD FORGOTTEN SOMETHING*

THE TROUBLE with the world is that people are greedy. No one is ever satisfied or, at least, the few that are aren't large enough to count. Take a man who is starving. That man will swear that all he wants to make him contented is three square meals a day. So you fix it that he gets his three squares, find him a job in a diner, maybe, clearing the dishes or washing up, and then what happens?

At first he'll be satisfied, but only until he's filled his stomach. Then he starts getting greedy. He'll want a new suit, someplace

to live, money for cigarettes, a car and a girl. So he gets them, and then he wants more. More to eat, more to wear, more girls to run around with. Maybe he'll get married and buy a house and raise a bunch of kids, but even then he won't be satisfied. He'll want a glamour puss, maybe a couple, a swank apartment, liquor, stuff like that, and he'll still be wanting something the day he dies. And that was the man, remember, who swore that he'd be happy if he could only get something to eat.

It takes a real man to be

P.R. GREEN



content, and he can only be that if he knows just what he wants. I know what I want, and I've got it, too, which is more than most people can say. But most people aren't honest, or they aren't philosophers. I'm both.

And there's only one thing an honest philosopher can be.

The fire wasn't drawing too good, the corn stalks held too much sap and the pot wasn't what it should be. Beat-up gas cans never make good cooking pots. They wear thin and buckle, and it's no fun trying to keep them balanced on a couple of bricks. It's even less fun when the wind is blowing and the air damp with recent rain. I blew into the fire, coughed as smoke billowed about me, and made a grab at the pot just as it threatened to topple over. Sammy waited until I had finished what I had to say.

"You curse real fine, doc," he said admiringly. "I guess it must be the book-learning."

"It helps." I sucked at a singed thumb. "What we need is a decent cooking pot."

"I'll get one." Sammy may have looked uncivilized, but his heart was in the right place. "I'll go looking for one right away."

"A big one, mind." Sammy's heart may have been in the right place, but I had some doubts as to his brains. Two centuries

ago he would have been called a "natural" and treated with tolerance. Now he was called a "nut" and no one treated him at all. But he could usually follow me if I kept things simple. "A good, solid one, something that will last. And don't steal it."

"Steal what?" Lizard sat up from where he'd been sleeping off the effects of some brew he'd found. He blinked and ran his tongue over his lips. The tongue, together with the dermatitis which had hardened and scaled his skin, made him look more reptilian than usual. The eyes didn't help either. "What you getting Sammy to do?"

"We need a new cooking pot." I nodded to Sammy to send him on his way. Lizard wasn't usually in the best of moods when he woke, and I didn't want him causing trouble. He grunted as he climbed to his feet and grunted again as he squatted cautiously beside the fire. He wasn't cautious enough. He gave a yelp as his left buttock touched the ground and cursed with more vehemence than artistry.

"That lousy, goddam farmer!" He eased himself on the dirt. "You sure you got it all out, Doc?"

"I'm sure."

"It don't feel like it." Lizard winced as he tried to get comfortable. "That yokel must have loaded his scatter gun with broken

glass." He swore again. "How about taking another look, Doc?"

It was inevitable that when I took up my new way of life I should be called either "Doc" or "Prof" and of the two I prefer the one I landed with. It has a certain air of dignity, but the side effects are apt to be troublesome. Too many of my colleagues think that I am a real doctor, probably one struck off the register for unethical conduct, and some of the propositions I've had put to me would surprise you.

"Well, Doc?" Lizard was getting impatient. "You going to take a look?"

"No." I was firm. Examining Lizard's bare backside for shot was something I had no intention of doing for the second time. Once had been more than enough. "There's nothing there," I said. "I got it all out when you came staggering back from that chicken hunt. Prodding about now will only make it worse."

He grunted but accepted my professional opinion. His nose wrinkled as he smelt the stew.

"What's to eat?"

"Stew."

"What's in it?" He peered into the can and lifted out something dark and almost shapeless.

"What's this? A cat?"

"An owl."

"You sure?" He sniffed, suspicious. "Don't look much like a bird to me."

"You want to take over the cooking?" It was a threat which always worked. Lizard dropped back the corpse and shook his head.

"Hell, no, Doc. You make a fine cook. It's just that with all them funny ideas of yours we could be eating rats and stuff like that." He sniffed again. "Cats I can stomach, owls, too, but I draw the line at rats."

"Nothing wrong with a nice rat." I gave the mixture a stir. "Mice make good eating, too, if you can get enough of them. And snakes; they taste tender, just like chicken. Then there's grasshoppers; you can eat those, too, and snails, and frogs, and . . ."

"All right, Doc." Lizard was curt. "You don't have to go into detail."

"I was just trying to point out that food is food," I said. "If you'd only look upon your body as a machine and food as fuel, Lizard, then you'd realise that a man has to try real hard before he can die of starvation."

"So you've told me," he said. "Often. It still don't make that slop taste nice."

I didn't bother to answer that one.

People are funny. Lizard, for instance. He was a natural-born hobo, a man who detested work in any shape or form, and was honest enough to admit it. But,

like everyone else, he was greedy. He wanted the fine things of life, snazzy clothes, soft cooking, a warm bed at night and a roof over his head. He wanted those things real bad, not bad enough to work for them, but he wanted them in the worst possible way. While we waited for the stew to cook I tried to show him just how wrong he was.

"Money is a curse, Lizard," I said. "When you've got nothing, then you've got nothing to worry about. Start getting possessions and then you start getting trouble. You want trouble?"

"You kidding?" He knew I wasn't. "Money might not make me happy," he said, "but it sure would allow me to be miserable in comfort."

"Maybe." I leaned back and looked at the sky. The wind had driven away the clouds, and the sun had broken through. It was late summer and the air was still warm and comfortable. Soon it would be winter, but that didn't worry me. Come the ice and snow and I'd be way down south where the sun was still shining. It made me feel good to know that I could go where I liked, when I liked, how I liked.

"Look at us," said Lizard. "Three tramps. Maybe it's all right for Sammy, he don't know no better, but how you stick it beats me. You ain't ignorant; the Judge said that the last time the

cops picked us up. You could get and hold a job if you wanted."

"I had a job once." I smiled up at the sky. "I had a car, and a house, and all the stuff you long for. I had money in the bank and the finest collection of ulcers ever owned by one stomach. It got so that I couldn't eat, couldn't sleep and was losing my hair. But I was a success—or so everyone kept telling me."

"Yeah?" Lizard didn't believe me.

"I was a business man and, brother, if you want worry, then you be a business man. Trade gets bad and you worry, trade gets good and you worry some more. Worry and business are two sides of the same coin; you have one and you get the other for free."

"But you lived easy." Lizard dug into his pocket and produced a crumpled butt. He lit it from the fire and breathed smoke. "You had all you wanted."

"No one gets what they want," I corrected. "Not unless they really know what they want. The rest get what they think they want." I relaxed still more. "I passed out one day, Lizard, bum ticker so the doctors told me, and for the first time in years I took time out to think. I did some real hard thinking while I waited, not knowing if I was going to pull out of it or not, and I surprised myself."

Lizard inhaled, not answering.

"You know, Lizard, the only way for a man to be free is not to want anything. As soon as you want something then you put yourself in the power of those who can give it to you."

"Bunk," said Lizard.

"You think so?" I rolled over, resting on one arm, staring at him. "You want to smoke, right?"

"Sure."

"You bum butts or you buy tobacco. To buy it you have to get someone to agree to give you money. To do that you've got to do as he says. Right?"

"You could look at it that way." Lizard was reluctant to agree. "But when I've got the money for the butts, what then?"

"Then you can be free again—only you won't." I rolled back to my original position. The sky was a lot more pleasant to look at than Lizard's face. "Smoking is a habit. Nice clothes are a habit. Eating off plates and drinking out of glasses, sleeping in beds and reading papers, all habits. And you pay for acquiring those habits, Lizard. You pay and keep on paying." I took a deep breath. "Me, I got no habits."

"The old tune," he sneered. "Next you'll be telling me that only you and those like you are really free."

"It's the simple truth. I don't want anything, so no one can take what I want. I can't lose anything so no one has any power

over me. They can jail me, sure, but so what? I don't want to go anywhere particular, do anything special. I can sleep in a cell as easy as on the ground."

"That's what you told the Judge," reminded Lizard. "He thought you was crazy. Hell, I think you're crazy."

Sammy came back just then and interrupted my reply.

He didn't return alone. He had a pot for company, a battered thing of brass, green with verdigris and knocked almost shapeless. I recognised it though; it had once been a spittoon. Sammy explained how he'd got it while Lizard dished up the stew.

"Man at the saloon threw it out." He chewed and spat out a bone. "Will it do?"

"You ain't figuring to cook in that thing." Lizard stared his disgust. "It'll kill us."

"We'll clean it first," I assured. "It looks solid and should do." I put the thing aside while I concentrated on my food. That was another lesson I kept trying to teach to others. Food is meant to be eaten, to be chewed, tasted, savoured and swallowed. That way you enjoy it, your stomach can handle it and you get the full benefit. Gulping it down as if you're in a race is a sure-fire way to collect ulcers.

After the meal I gave some attention to the pot. It was old

and had probably been collecting dust for half a century. It was logical that it should have been thrown out, but I had to make sure.

"Did you steal it?"

"No." Sammy looked straight at me. "Honest, Doc, the man gave it to me for free."

I believed him and so did Lizard.

"Who'd want to hold onto a thing like that?" he said. "It's just junk."

"It'll make a good pot." I rubbed at it and was rewarded by the gleam of brass. The metal had a pattern and I could imagine it back in the old days when such things had been used. "Once we get it polished up with sand it'll look real good."

"What about the inside?" Lizard didn't seem too happy. "You're aiming for us to eat out of that thing remember?"

"We'll clean that, too." I handed it to Sammy. "Here, you do it. Use sand and water and plenty of elbow grease. Lizard can take over when you've had enough."

"With my sore leg?" Lizard scowled but hunched forward to watch as Sammy got to work. Half-wit or not, he was willing, and sweat shone on his face as he scrubbed and rubbed at the pot. He finished the outside and started on the interior, using plenty of sand and water as he rubbed away the accumulated grime. He

hummed to himself as he worked, an odd, wordless tune he'd probably picked up from some juke box and almost forgotten. It was while he was humming and scrubbing that it happened.

There was a gush of smoke, a tingling sensation like a mild electric shock and a peculiar scent of must and decay. A voice rumbled through the air and a great face glared down at us from the cloud of smoke.

"Hell!" Lizard forgot his lacerated rump as he scabbled away. "It's a bomb!"

Sammy said nothing, just sat, open-mouthed as he stared at the apparition. It writhed, coalesced and became an old man with a dirty white turban and a knee-length frock coat. He reminded me of a palmist I'd once met, and there was a good reason for him looking so old and tired. He was old, about five thousand years old if I'd guessed right, and anyone would get tired in that time.

"Hail, master," he said wearily. "I am yours to command."

He sat cross-legged on the ground and stared at Sammy with a patient expression.

"I don't believe it!" Lizard was emphatic. "That stuff's for the birds."

"All right, give me a better explanation." I pointed to the pot where it lay, glistening in the

dying rays of the sun. "Sammy rubs the pot and the Jinn appears. What more do you want?"

"Gin?" Lizard scowled. "That guy wasn't no gin."

"Jinn." I spelt it for him. "Aladdin's Lamp. Get it?"

"Where did he go?" Sammy was worried. After the initial appearance I'd ordered the Jinn to leave us and await our call. He hadn't obeyed. Only Sammy, it seemed, had the right power. Sammy'd backed me, but was now worrying about the disappearance of the stranger.

"He'll be back," I said. "Just rub the pot and he'll be back."

"I don't get it," said Lizard. "That pot must have been polished lots of times in the past. Why now?"

"I don't know. Try it again, Sammy."

"Will it be all right, Doc?"

"Sure, try it again." I watched as Sammy rubbed. He began to sweat and nothing happened. Lizard snorted.

"See?"

"Try some other place." I remembered something. "And sing, you know, that song you were humming. Start humming and rub the same place where you was rubbing before."

It took a long time and I was beginning to get worried when finally Sammy managed to hit the

right combination. The gush of smoke came again, together with the mild shock and the rest of it. I stared at the old man standing before us.

"Are you a Jinn?"

He glanced at Sammy, who nodded. "Go ahead and talk to Doc."

"As you desire, master." The old man sighed. "I am, indeed, the Slave of the Lamp, imprisoned therein by Solomon and constrained to obey those who command."

"Nuts!" Lizard was getting annoyed. "This thing ain't a lamp, it's a goddam spittoon."

"The metal in which my essence was imprisoned has undergone many changes," said the Jinn tiredly. "I had hopes . . ." He shrugged.

"Hopes that you would be free from the commands of your masters?"

"Even so." He glanced towards me and I could guess just how he felt. For me one lifetime having to do as others wanted had been half a lifetime too much. I felt sorry for the old guy. Sammy sensed it, too.

"You ain't no slave," he said. "You don't have to be kicked around."

"You release me?" The flame of hope in the Jinn's eyes was something to see. I felt proud as I looked at Sammy. It's always

heartening to any philosopher to see the fruits of his teaching.

"Sure," said Sammy. "You don't owe me nothing."

"The blessings of Allah be upon you and yours to the end of time!" The Jinn seemed to shed his age like a snake its skin. "May your . . ."

"Hold it!" Lizard had been thinking. "You can't do that, Sammy."

"Why not?" Lizard waved me to silence.

"We're partners, ain't we? What we got we share, right?" He didn't wait for an answer. "Well, I figure I got a share in this thing and I aim to collect." He sucked in his cheeks. "Now, if I get it right, this old guy will do whatever Sammy tells him to do."

"So?"

"So, before Sammy turns him loose, I reckon that he ought to do something for us." He became cunning. "It's only fair, ain't it?"

"I guess so." Sammy was troubled. "Is that right, Doc?"

"Greed," I said. "Everyone's the . . ." The Jinn cut me short.

"My gracious master has already released me from bondage," he said. "Yet I would not cause dissension. This I will do. To each of you I will be servant to the extent of one command. What you desire you shall have." He folded his arms over his chest. "I have spoken."

He'd said enough.

What would you say if you had the chance of making a wish that would come true? And you'd have to answer straight away, remember; no chance for talking it over with friends and studying the market. The Jinn was raring to go, and we had to make it fast. Personally, I didn't have to think, I knew what I wanted. Sammy, too. I'd taught him well, or I thought I had, and he spoke up without hesitation. Lizard's choice was obvious.

"Money," he said. "I want money."

"Ten sacks of dinars will I bring," promised the Jinn. "Ten sacks of well-tanned hide filled to the brim." I yelled for him to stop, just in time.

"What's wrong?" Lizard was impatient to get his hands on the money.

"Dinars are made of brass," I explained. "Legal tender in his time, but scrap metal now. Think again."

"Sure." Lizard was shaken. "Gold?"

"Currency regulations; you need a licence to own gold."

"It's heavy, too." Lizard frowned in thought. "A diamond," he said. "The biggest damn diamond in the world." He grinned at me as the Jinn vanished. "Smart, eh? Portable currency, good anywhere." His grin vanished as the Jinn reappeared and put some-

thing before him. "Is that a diamond?"

It was as big as a football and looked like a stone. I prodded it, turned it and shrugged.

"It's a diamond, all right. An uncut one; you didn't specify that it should be polished, remember."

"But it's valuable?"

"It's the biggest in the world."

"That's all I want to know."

Lizard may have had a sore leg, but he forgot it as he scooped up the stone and ran towards the village. I watched him go, feeling a little sorry for him. He'd be robbed or murdered for sure, either that or spend the rest of his life in jail trying to explain how he got the rock in the first place.

"Well?" With Lizard gone the Jinn was a little less impatient.

"You know what I want," I said. "I just want to be left alone."

"Nothing else?" The Jinn seemed surprised. "No gold, no jewels, no fair women, mansions, palaces, rich foods, heady wines, soft music? Nothing?"

"Nothing." I thought of something. "Don't get me wrong about this. I don't want people to avoid me or be prevented from helping me. It's just that I'm an honest philosopher. I've worked out my own way of life and I want to stick to it. I don't want anyone bothering me. I just want to be left alone."

"I hear and obey." The Jinn

bowed and looked at Sammy. "And for you, master?"

Sammy told him what he wanted.

"I want to be happy," he said. "Happy all the time."

"Happy, master?" The Jinn seemed disconcerted.

"He knows the real values in life," I said. "Sammy's like me, a philosopher."

"That's right." Sammy grinned. "All I want is to be happy."

"All?" The Jinn cast up his eyes. "Think well, master. Much can I give you, soft maidens to while away your cares, pleasant . . ."

"I don't want nothing to while away no cares," said Sammy. "I don't want no cares to while away. I just want to be happy."

"Truly happy, master?"

"Sure. Happy all the way."

"It shall be as you desire," said the Jinn quietly. "Master, farewell!"

There was a puff of smoke, a crackling sound and a flash of light. When I could use my eyes again I found that I was alone.

Really alone. Lizard had gone, the pot had gone, the Jinn had gone, and Sammy . . .

Where he had sat was a charred and empty space, and, looking at it, I cursed myself for a fool.

Any philosopher should have known that a man can only be truly happy when he is dead.

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PROPHET WITHOUT HONOUR

by WILLIAM E. BENTLEY

*THE TROUBLE WITH AN OMNIPOTENT PROPHET IS
THAT IT KNOWS TOO MUCH. TRYING TO ALTER THE
PROPHECY COULD BE THE ONE SURE WAY TO MAKE
IT COME TRUE*

THE RULER of a planet that had a black dwarf for a sun, had called a meeting of his council. It was some time before they were assembled and he waited patiently without thought.

When the patchwork of mentalities was complete, he allowed the conclusions of the Prognosticator to occupy his mind, and a wall of unanimous incredulity sprang up.

The prophecy was simple and quite clear. A distant planet was about to achieve space flight. When they did so, they would come to this planet and use a weapon, invented by one of their race, to conquer and destroy it. The Prognosticator could not lie, and soon the facade of disbelief confronting the ruler dissolved into individual reactions as acceptance became general. There

was anger, and fear, and greedy little thoughts of self-aggrandisement. Those thoughts were replaced by a quiescent, questioning receptivity. The questioning grew out of proportion, became hysterical, assumed the panic shape. Self-preservation demanded that there be a solution. Minor prophecies had been evaded before. Details of the key individual had been supplied; could not something be done? Something *must* be done.

Dr. Simon Cartwright, of Earth, must die.

The Assassin was summoned.

A man was walking along a road. A high road. A silent, dark road. Below him on both sides of the road flat marshland swept away, and a little wind caressed him with chill fingers. His tiny

world of road beneath him, darkness around him, sky above him, contained only the sound of his footsteps—and one other. A regular, liquid sound. He thought it was a sound from the marsh. He listened to it, and wondered how long it had been with him. It was close behind him on the road. He stopped, turned round in small curiosity, and bellowed in great horror. He threw up his hands against an immense bulk, an impossible shape, a lurching, flowing movement. Then it was upon him, and had stilled his futile movements, and had passed over him, and had left him dead.

The Assassin continued along the road. It was aware that it had killed, but it could not contemplate the fact. It possessed all the mental powers of its race, but its conditioning had focused them in one direction, the assassination of Dr. Cartwright. It could consider only those factors which had a direct relation to that purpose.

Daylight was one of those factors.

It was not aware of the passage of time, but when the sensitive patch on its back began to contract, it left the road and went onto the marsh. There, it burrowed into the slime until green-flecked water closed over it. And deeper until a depth of mud protected it from the sun.

Dr. Cartwright groaned and sat

up in bed. He silenced the telephone by putting the receiver to his ear.

"Do you know what time it is?" he asked, aggrieved.

"Hello? Dr. Cartwright? This is the police."

"It is six o'clock," continued Simon. "For me, the middle of the night. I am in no fit state to measure a drunk's reactions."

"I'm sorry, sir. Inspector Andrews ordered me to phone you. There's been an accident on the Waverton Highway. A man is dead."

"Inspector Andrews, eh? Must be a big job. Murder or something? Anyway, tell him I'm on my way."

He put the receiver down and got out of bed. His wife muttered something unintelligible and wrapped his share of the blankets round her. Simon went downstairs. He made a cup of coffee and drank it while he dressed. His car engine was cold, but his house was on a slight incline and he was able to coast down to the Highway.

The road was level and straight, and after he had been driving for some time a little tableau came into sight—two cars, an ambulance, a group of uniforms. Inspector Andrews, tall, thin, dyspeptic, greeted him with a limp handshake. "Something funny about this," he said. "See what you think."

Simon went down on one knee beside the body and began to undo the clothing. After a time he looked up into the sky. "This is peculiar," he said.

"I know," grunted Andrews. "Can they take the body now?"

Simon stood up and nodded. He remained staring out across the marsh until the body had been removed and the ambulance a distant object. Then he went and sat in the car. Inspector Andrews finished giving instructions to his sergeant, and joined him. "I'll let you give me breakfast," he said.

"You're very kind," said Simon absently, and released the brake.

"Any use asking for the cause of death?" asked Andrews.

"Oh, the cause of death was crushing, but the cause of the cause of death——" Simon shook his head. "There wasn't an unbroken bone in his body. Could he have been dropped from an airplane?"

Andrews shook a ponderous head. "He was a bus driver on his way to work, without an enemy in the world. And I've a feeling his death is going to keep me awake at nights. Anyway, Sergeant Bennett is going over the area with a magnifying glass, and I'll put out some patrols. We'll put up a pretty good show. What about the time of death?"

"Impossible to tell. Not long

ago. Certainly not more than four hours."

"Yes, that ties in with the time he was expected at work. But can you suggest what might have killed him?"

"It wasn't a car," said Simon carefully. "The skin was unbroken except from the inside. I can only suggest something like a rubber-covered steam roller."

That night the Assassin killed two people.

When it grew dark it heaved its bulk up out of the slime. A long business of bodily expansion and contraction. Two men were on the road and heard the noise it made.

"Something out there."

"Stray cow, maybe."

They stood and peered into the darkness, trying to see a familiar shape. The Assassin approached them, and was too big for them to see. They stood in its path and looked for a familiar object in the blackness of its body. So the instant of apprehension was small, the panic and exertion soon over. Without pausing, the Assassin moved over them and continued on its way.

A little later Inspector Andrews found them. He was in a radio patrol car, and he was moving in the same direction as the Assassin. With him in the car were three large men carrying automatic rifles. Andrews stopped the car,

and one of the men got out and knelt by the bodies. Andrews watched him for a moment then reached for the microphone. He spoke to the station sergeant.

"Inspector Andrews here. Send an ambulance out here and phone Dr. Cartwright. Tell him the steam roller is loose again. It may be on the road and heading his way. Yes, steam roller. He'll understand."

He put the microphone down, called to the man on the road. "I'm leaving you here, Roberts. There's an ambulance on the way. Stay here until it arrives and go back with it. And don't play the hero. If you see anything that could be responsible for this, stay out of its reach and watch it. Do you understand?"

He closed the car window and pressed the starter button. The empty road began to unwind slowly into the area of light ahead.

Simon put the receiver down and looked at his wife. She was concentrating on a sock by the fire. He went over and kissed the top of her head. "Goodbye," she said.

"Listen," he said quietly. "When I'm gone lock the door behind me and don't go out. If you hear any funny noises go down to the cellar. Right?"

She was a little frightened. "Honey, what is it?"

He smiled. "It's nothing. Long John Andrews is out hunting, and I'm going along in case he shoots himself."

He took his shotgun off the mantel and stuffed his pockets with cartridges.

"I'll bring you back a rabbit," he said. "So long."

He drove down slowly. He was scared, but he was still young enough to find it exhilarating. The loaded shotgun was a great help.

He turned onto the Highway, and slowed to a walking pace. He stared into the darkness until his eyes burned, and imagination peopled his surroundings with writhing shapes.

Then he saw it, and the muscles across his chest trembled convulsively. Fear clutched his stomach. He slammed his foot down on the brake, and gaped up at it. It was standing still in the middle of the road, a giant, pear-shaped body, looking something like a man kneeling upright. At the front, turned inwards, were a number of arm-like appendages.

The shotgun was ridiculous now, the car made of paper. To get out and run was impossible, and he longed to be able to sit still and do nothing. The seconds dragged by. Time for contemplation built up, and a strange realisation dropped into his seething mind. He sensed something about its attitude. A cringing, a

withdrawal. "God," he whispered. "It doesn't like the light."

He might have relaxed then, but it moved. One of its arms unfolded, swung outward holding something metallic. Simon yelled. He grabbed the shotgun, shoved the door catch down, threw his weight sideways. He landed on his shoulder, rolled and kept on rolling. He reached the other side of the road, straightened up, and saw the roof of the car fly off with a roar. He fired from a crouching position and without taking aim. A lucky shot that hit the end of the weapon arm and shattered it. Then he ran, and the Assassin followed.

He ran in the direction he'd been going, and he gave himself up to terror. He was primæval man fleeing from sabre-tooth. He was living a nightmare. His brain reeled, air burnt his lungs, and his pounding heart echoed in his temples. Each step was an explosion that jarred his body and numbed his brain. Then he was suddenly in a blaze of light, running between headlight beams, and he crashed into a hot radiator. Somebody was yelling frenziedly: "What the hell—what the hell—what the hell!" And to his left was the flame and crash of high-powered rifles. A black figure came into his haven of light, began to loosen his tie.

"Get out of the light," he gasped. "It doesn't like the light."

"What the blazes are you doing here?" growled Andrews. "And what the blazes is that thing?" He put Simon's arm round his neck, and half carried him round to the side of the car, pushed him into the front seat.

"I'll be all right in a minute," said Simon.

"Yeah," said Andrews, and left him.

After a while the trembling in his limbs began to subside, and his breathing became easier. He leaned forward and watched a strange battle. The Assassin was about seventy yards ahead, moving steadily nearer. Two men were standing on the right-hand side of the car, pumping bullets into the grey, indistinct mass. Andrews stood watching with his hands in his pockets. Suddenly he said: "All right, let go. You're only wasting bullets."

Simon looked at him in alarm. "Hey," he called. "You can't just stand there. It doesn't like the light, but light can't kill it."

"Lie down on the floor," said Andrews dourly, without looking at him.

"Eh?"

Andrews ignored him, stepped two paces forward. The Assassin was about twenty yards away now, seeming to have to fight against the stream of light. Andrews took his hands from his pockets, and Simon saw what he was holding. He dived for the

floor and clasped his hands over the back of his neck as the night exploded with a gigantic crash.

When his ears had stopped screaming he got up. Andrews, his elbow on the window ledge, was watching him expressionlessly.

"You might have left me something to dissect," complained Simon. "Somebody's got to, you know."

"I'll mop you up a spongeful," said Andrews.

They looked at each other and grinned, but only briefly. Inspector Andrews could not allow his facade of tough, laconic competence to relax for long while his men were watching.

"Will you stay back here," said Simon. "That thing is probably crawling with alien bacteria. I'll go up and have a look at what there is left."

Actually, quite a lot of the Assassin was left, but decomposition was very rapid. Simon did the best he could with a magnifying glass and a penknife. He found that the body was almost entirely composed of bone and flesh in a honeycomb-like structure, the bone being highly flexible, and the cavities filled with grey flesh. Flesh which quickly liquefied and drained away from the bone. There was no blood, and Simon could find no trace of internal organs.

While he worked, two more

cars drove up and gave him a little more light, but soon he had to give up. As he walked slowly back a spotlight sprang suddenly to life, and a pleasant, authoritative voice spoke from the darkness.

"Will you stay where you are, please, Dr. Cartwright."

Simon obeyed. Hell, he thought wearily. Officialdom has arrived. Well, it had to happen. Now for the red tape. He shaded his eyes against the light, but he could see nothing.

"Who's that?" he called.

"I am Colonel Alpine. Commanding officer in charge of operations in this emergency. You have made an examination?"

"As far as I could. There's almost complete decomposition now."

"Oh, I see." A slight pause, then: "Perhaps I'll put you in the big picture. Other things have been happening, and we were not entirely unprepared for something like this. But first let me tell you that this is war. In any language, in any environment, this is armed aggression, and we are now at war.

"Several days ago our monitors observed the approach of your friend's vessel. It landed in the sea, twenty miles from here. Its discovery was kept secret because we were not sure of its point of origin. It was empty when it was discovered, and we both know what happened to the occupant. Our people are engaged, at this

moment, in finding the method of propulsion, and it is now clear that our friend came from outside the Solar system. They also report that we can use the same method of propulsion which will give us the ability to travel in space. Do I make myself clear?"

You long-winded ass, thought Simon. Come to the point. "Go on," he said.

"Well, now, all those things are top priority, of course, including the determination of the position of the enemy planet, but in the meantime we must have an emergency line of defence against these things. We want to know how to find them and how to destroy them with the least possible expenditure of life and material. You understand?"

"Yes, and I've got an idea about light waves, the bone structure——"

"Don't tell me," interrupted the voice sharply. "Remember it. Understand, Dr. Cartwright, that you are just about the most important man alive. You know how fast this thing can move. You have fought it, you have examined it. You are very valuable to us, and I have orders to take good care of you and to give you every facility for further research. But first you must go into quarantine because we dare not risk a plague. After quarantine, you will go to work with our people. Now, will you

please get into the car at the extreme right, and follow the police?"

"Where am I going?"

"Please hurry. There is a team of incendiaries waiting to clear the area."

"Oh, damnation," sighed The Most Important Man Alive, and walked towards the waiting car.

When the ruler consulted the Prognosticator again, after the Assassin's failure had been recorded, he found that a qualification had been added. The prophecy was now being fulfilled.

He considered this statement dispassionately, and visualised the complex pattern of implication almost with pleasure.

Was the machine alive? Certainly it could contemplate itself, because it had calculated the effect of its existence in their culture, and had used the knowledge to destroy them. Or had they condemned themselves? By losing the ability to question. For the information on which the prophecy was based could have been made available to them. Or was the machine only obeying a greater fate? A Decree, stating that any life-form that surrendered itself to the dictates of one of its own products, was doomed.

One thing alone was left to him. A choice. Without haste, he began the preliminaries to thinking himself to death.

Ray Cummings Dead

IT IS WITH DEEP REGRET that we announce the death of Raymond K. Cummings, who died of a cerebral hemorrhage, at the age of 69, on January 22nd, 1957, in Mt. Vernon, N.Y., U.S.A.

Ray Cummings was a pioneer of the scientific romance era of science fiction and great in stature with the medium. Older readers will remember him for his famous *Girl in the Golden Atom*, first published in 1919. This story was followed by a sequel, *The Princess of the Atom*, which is almost as well known. One of the most prolific writers in the field, he was well known between the wars for such stories as *The Man Who Mastered Time*, *Brigands of the Moon*, *Wandle the Invader*, *The Exile of Time* and a host of others. Hundreds of his stories appeared in American science fiction magazines and he was published in Canadian, English and Swedish periodicals. He was also noted for his detective stories.

As a young man Cummings was employed by Alva Edison for five years as his personal assistant. His last major public appearance was at the 14th World Science Fiction Convention held in New York last year, when he was lionized by the fans, to many of whom he was almost a legend. Several novels by him are due for publication.

He is survived by his wife, Gabrielle, herself an author and sometimes collaborator with Cummings, and his daughter, Elizabeth Cummings Hill, also a writer.

To those who knew him his death will be a personal loss, but all who read and enjoyed his stories in the early days of magazine science fiction will feel regret at his passing. As his personal representative and agent, Forest J. Ackerman, commented when he sent the news: "My personal feeling is that Cummings was gladiator number one in the adventure arena of science fiction."

There are many who will agree with him.

THE EVOLUTION OF MAN

by

KENNETH JOHNS

Part 7—PRELUDE TO MAN

THE FIRST finds of Pithecanthropus were along the Solo River, near the village of Trinil. There have been further discoveries since 1936, all going to show that here is the first known fossil that could have been an ancestor of man, and it is suggested that he was, from his isolated position, ancestral to some of the less advanced cultures of today.

He had a short thick neck and the typical protruding brow ridges to support the muscles of his jaws. His cranial capacity was about 940 c.c.s., so that he still had some way to go to match even the modern primitive's 1,200 c.c.s.

A later discoverer, Von Koenigswald—he of the gigantic teeth from drugstores—worked the Trinil

river area and, after a fragment of skull had been brought to him, offered his native helpers ten cents for every fragment they found. The natural result followed. It pointedly indicates that scientific research is the pursuit of a certain type of mind and education, and must wait some time yet before it supplants mere greed in men's occupations. The native workers broke every piece of skull they could lay hands on into smaller pieces. At one time Von Koenigswald had the job of piecing together thirty fragments—which had been shattered just recently after thousands of years in the earth—to form a very fine Pithecanthropus skull.

Although walking upright, Java

Man probably carried his head projecting forward, and there is evidence from development of the skull in the areas associated with speech that some form of primitive communication had come into use. Animals make sounds and use signals, but they do not deal in abstractions and symbols—language—and attempts to train them into using language have met with little success due to the severe mental and nervous strain imposed. One chimpanzee developed a severe muscular tic whenever he used the few simple words he had been taught. It is possible, by studying a skull—not a jaw—to estimate whether its owner could talk. From Java Man on it seems clear that all races of men—whether *Homo sapiens* or not—had the power of crude speech.

When Dubois had unearthed the straight femur, he knew that the Java Man fossils were unusual, the contrast in development with the skulls was overpowering. The upper brain case is thicker than in any other man or ape; there is no forehead, and there is a gap in the corner of the upper teeth which provides space for the tip of the lower canine. This “tooth gap” is typically apish, and is not found in any other man. The molar teeth of Java Man are more human-like than ape-like, being wider sideways than they are front-to-back, and there is the

barest hint of a chin. Ape jaws, seen from above, are square, the teeth ranged in two parallel rows of molars, the two canines at the corners and the four incisors closing the front. As man became more human, the jaw grew lighter, the shape rounder, and the canines shortened into line with the other teeth. It is by the shape of the jaw that evolution is once again proven.

As the jaw lightens and the great muscles supporting it grow less, the huge brow ridges on which these muscles hinge become unnecessary, until today, a person with large brow ridges is regarded as a throwback. But the jaw must have sufficient strength to support the biting action, and man has achieved this by developing a chin, a girder construction supporting the lower jaw. The bigger the chin the more man-like the fossil. Coupled with these changes are the diminution in size of the face and the growth in volume of the brain and consequent thinning and enlargement of the skull.

Java Man had still a long way to go before he could be regarded as truly human, although fossils of what may be his descendants show a much higher culture level. The Australopiths were using rough clubs—the humerus broken off large animals, and with their joint ends having two knobs which fit the twin indentations in

the crushed baboon skulls, a fine example of archaeological detective work—but both they and Java Man seem to have had but rudimentary stone cultures. Stones found in allied sites may be semi-worked tools or they may be the results of natural erosion. These coliths, or “dawn-stones,” found in profusion in England and France, probably belonged to parallel or slightly later cultures.

Mankind was still fumbling along on his journey to the stars; but first he had to meet and overcome a severe peril of his own planet.

Although Africa felt little of the direct consequences of the ice ages, the broad steel-blue sheets of ice that crept down from the pole, hesitated, and then retreated, only to return thrice more, affected the development of man in Africa no less than elsewhere. Fossils of elephant were dug up in Leadenhall Street, and walrus have been unearthed in Georgia, a wild contrast in fauna and modern climate. As the icy glaciers pushed forward and back, the most tremendous herds of hoofed animals the world has ever seen lived on the grassy plains to the south.

The Cenozoic Era, or the Age of Mammals, in its first period, the Tertiary, saw the rise of mammalian forms. The second period, the Quaternary, opened a

million years ago with the Pleistocene Epoch and witnessed the rise of man. In all there were four great glaciations in this Epoch, during the first of which the Australopithecus died out. Java Man rose aroughly during the first interglacial and second glacial periods. There are strong grounds for connecting the ice ages directly with man's development; in the hostile environment lowering over the world, in a struggle with other animals for food and living space, man, lacking natural fighting equipment, was forced to use his newly-liberated hands under the guidance of his growing brain to outdo all Nature's fangs and claws.

As living grew tougher and animals fled before the onslaught of the ice, or died out through inability to face new conditions, man faced the challenge and overcame it.

Many mammalian species perished in the widespread glaciations and consequent geologic and climatic changes; but some adapted as the Earth chilled. Mammoths and the woolly rhinoceros survived by their development of thick insulating hair. In general, the mammals have been heading for extinction ever since then, in a possibly slower, but nonetheless sure fashion as the dinosaurs—only mankind seems to be temporarily successful; but unless his new-found powers of genocide are soon controlled by

his brain, his emotions may well place him on a par with the dodo and the dinosaurs.

About one million years ago there came a turning point in the history of life on Earth. Strange objects, like nothing seen before, began to be scattered along the game trails and before the cave mouths. These were the first artificial tools ever made on Earth.

The earliest tools, the eoliths, were not manufactured; they were natural stones crudely split by accident or intent to give a cutting edge. There is literally a world of difference between picking up a handy lump of stone to brain a sabre-tooth or to clean off a skin and then idly tossing it away when the work is finished, and making and using tools.

Fish are known which poke their heads out of water and shoot down flies with water flak; spiders construct complicated webs as hunting traps, and beavers fell trees with their teeth. There are many such examples in the animal world of natural tools, all stemming directly from the use of animals' bodies. Only man takes the next step, logical enough to us, of using a *tool on a tool* to make a better instrument.

Geologists and palæontologists divide the recent million years on this planet into stages by two different yardsticks, sub-dividing it according to the four ice ages

and the unequally enduring interglacials, and further splitting these according to the state of early man's cultures. And the importance of stone tools is shown when these names are chosen to indicate the stages of man's career. The Palæolithic, or Old Stone Age, covers by far the majority of this million years. It is only in the very recent past that bronze, and iron and plastics came to be used.

This upward march was not a straight line route from primate, through the various gradually more human fossils-forms, to man. If anything, the story shown by fossil finds is that man himself is the current end product of a mysterious main-line of development, from which spring many other branches of man. Man-like people lived and died thousands of years before later, and in nearly every way more brutish, types came onto the scene. The record of the rocks is confusing and leads to the inescapable conclusion that many different species of men existed, often side by side, at most of the stages since his first coming to an upright stance.

But we do know that Pekin Man, *Sinanthropus*, is the first man of whose mastery of fire, use of tools and possession of culture—however macabre and grisly—we can be sure.

When Dr. Davidson Black named a new man from a single

tooth found in 1927 in Dragon Bone Hill, just above the sleepy village of Choukoutien, many difficulties had to be overcome before the hill—named for the medicinal dragon bones found there by the Chinese—could be properly worked. At last the anthropologists were rewarded and gradually they brought to light over forty specimens, in various stages of completeness, of this ancient people.

Pekin Man lived after Java Man, during the Second or Great Interglacial, 420,000 to 220,000 years ago. There is the hint of a forehead in the skull, and even of a chin. His cranial capacity had increased to between 850 and 1,300 c.c.s but he was still a brutal looking man, although he stood on legs that were only slightly thicker and more clumsy than our own.

But his chief claim to fame lies in the clear evidences of his culture. Many quartz tools have been found. Thick black layers of the debris of fires, lying above red, hardpacked earth of his hearths, tell of his culinary arts. The bones of many animals, some charred, all now extinct, show that he was a mighty hunter. Fire renders tough meat easier to digest, and thus, once man cooked his food, it is probable that his numbers increased because life had become just that much easier—no longer had he to gnaw on raw meat and splintered bones.

And fire also destroyed much forest land, creating vast open prairies on which the vegetarian food animals man hunted could proliferate at a pace beyond even early man's capacity to destroy.

Pekin Man used and made tools, although they were roughly broken stones chipped to no specific design. They were functional; but the concept of an ideal form—the shape to be striven for—was beyond Pekin Man's mental capacity. Whilst he had learnt to use fire he had probably not learnt to create it. A picture is at once conjured of the sacred guardians of the flame, which must never die.

Pekin Man not only ate animals—he killed and ate his own kind, cracking open the skulls to sample the brains as a fine delicacy.

This trait ties in with a further discovery, made at Ngandong on the same Solo River where *Pithecanthropus Erectus* was found. Two shinbones and eleven skulls were found, and the species has been named Solo Man. Solo Man was a descendant of Java Man, with a little more brain, a little more forehead and chin—but not much more—and still with the heavy ridges across the brows. The head was better balanced on the spine, and although the skulls are larger than in Java Man, the brain is not so much greater in proportion, being a little larger than in Pekin Man. All these skulls were minus faces, with their bases

smashed in—it is easier for the cook to extract brains from the base of the skull.

Again, it seems, the cannibals had been at work.

Solo Man was a descendant of Java Man, yet he had a skull differing in form from Pekin Man. Already the divergence of race is becoming apparent.

Dating from a much later period, unconnected with the older remains found nearby, a scene of ritual slaying or of mass murder was uncovered in 1931 in a higher cave of the Choukoutien Hills near Pekin. In a cave crammed with thousands of skeletons of hares and deer, hyenas, bears and tigers, were revealed the remains of a family of seven, united in death. The man, sixty years old, an exceptional age for those times, was of a primitive European type. One woman had a skull similar to those of the New Guinea Melanesians, whilst the second woman was remarkably like the modern Eskimo. Such a mixture poses many problems. Dr. Franz Weidenreich, the discoverer, hazards the guess that there were many racial types existing side by side at these early times, and they split at later periods. This glimpse into the mystery and violence of the past dates from the Upper Palæolithic, a period much later than any others of the surrounding fossil finds.

Pekin Man, after resting for so

long in the earth, had little time allowed him above it. Towards the end of 1941 the threat of war in the East became so obvious that the Chinese requested the Americans to take charge of the priceless relics. Although reluctant, the colonel in command of the U.S. Marine detachment at the U.S. Embassy took the fossils, stored in glass jars, aboard a train to be embarked at Chingwangtao aboard the liner *President Harrison*. That was December 5th.

Two days later, with the world situation in flames, the *Harrison* was grounded on a mud bank and the train carrying the fossils was captured and looted at Chingwangtao. What happened to the fossils is unknown. The Japanese may have given them to the Chinese for medicinal purposes, they may have been sunk whilst aboard a lighter for transshipment to a vessel to carry them to Tokyo, or the looting Japanese around the burning train may have simply tossed them aside as worthless old bones in glass jars. No one knows.

Fortunately, casts of some of the specimens, made by Dr. Weidenreich, are preserved in the American Museum of Natural History. It is unlikely that Pekin Man was an ancestor of *Homo sapiens*, and although the casts have given us, through the painstaking work of Dr. Weidenreich, the completest knowledge of any fossil man finds,

we must await further discoveries before more is known about Pekin Man.

Probably because there are no other fossil finds to guide us, anthropologists tend to believe that the story of sub-man and man must be followed from this stage on using the fossil discoveries found in Europe and England. There are two puzzling fossils of sub-men from Africa to be fitted into the overall picture—and then the rest of our knowledge comes from the Old World.

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WITH THE WORLD POLICE READY AND EAGER TO
PUNISH ANY AGGRESSOR WAR WAS IMPOSSIBLE.
BUT WHAT IF THEY COULDN'T FIND THE AGGRESSOR?

DEAD WEIGHT

by DOUGLAS WEST

SECOND OF THREE PARTS



SYNOPSIS

WHEN DOCTOR BLUE, in 1967, perfected a method of banishing natural death he did more than grant to humanity a potential immortality—he also gave the world a first-class headache. Now, ninety-five years after the introduction of the longevity treatment, things are coming to a head.

An uneasy compromise with the old social order has been achieved by declaring all Blues, as those who have taken the treatment are popularly called, legally dead. They can own no property, lose their right to vote, their job and to take an active part in politics. On taking the treatment their goods pass to their heirs and from then on they are dependant on charity. But such charity can only be found within their own families, and the dead weight of the growing body of non-productive consumers is beginning to get out of hand.

Sam Falkirk, Captain in the World Police, and stationed at the World Council building in New York, is present at an ugly incident when a corner-preacher is battered almost to death by a group of teenagers on a Blue-bait. He is attracted to Carmen Augustine, the daughter of one of the special messengers attached to the World Council, but denies his feelings because he knows that people now

marry to have children—so that those children can help support their parents and grandparents when they are legally dead. He does not want to pass on such a heritage.

Angelo Augustine, the messenger, is also a spy in the pay of Senator Rayburn, a fanatical Nationalist, who firmly believes that the Orient is about to war on the Occident for the fast-vanishing living space they must have. A self-seeker, Rayburn is both afraid of death and afraid of losing his power and thinks that a solution can be reached if he can find a scapegoat. So he pays Angelo to spy on the Asiatic Bloc with special reference to Senator Sacamari of the Japanese Legation.

Angelo, during the course of his duties, is given a parcel to deliver by an employee of Sacamari. He opens it and discovers it to be an ornate box enclosing a carved statue of Buddha. The statue is coated with some substance which he tastes. Before he can deliver the parcel it is stolen from him by Joe Leghorn, a down-and-out trouble-shooter, who is desperate for money and not too particular how he gets it.

In the excitement of the chase Angelo collapses and is taken to hospital, where Doctor Jelks, a Blue, examines him. Jelks, only a few days before, had examined the messenger and passed him as fit

and is worried by the apparent heart condition of the sick man.

Sam, trying to comfort Carmen at her home, is called to the phone. Angelo is dead—but not from natural causes.

VII

THE HORROR WAS THE THING Sucamari had brought back with him from the Orient, smuggled in his diplomatic bag. A simple thing on the face of it, an inlaid box of ivory and mother of pearl containing a statue of Buddha nested on protective floss. Even had it been inspected at the customs it was innocent enough, the sort of thing which any traveller from the East might purchase as a curiosity or, as in the case of Sucamari, as an item to add to his collection. For the horror wasn't the box, nor the floss, nor the statue itself. It was in the substance which coated it.

Well over a century ago men had first toyed with the concept of using the smallest allies. Of turning from the big to the almost invisible, the tiny bacteria instead of the tearing destruction of explosives. In itself the concept wasn't new. Long before diseased women had been sent among enemy troops to weaken them with infection, but then, as earlier, the weapon had been two-edged. Infection, once released, spread. Bacteria has no

friends. Disease, once released, would be impartial to all, and both sides would suffer. A victory under those circumstances would be a Pyrrhic one, and now, as never before, any nation stooping to bacteriological warfare would suffer ghastly retaliation. The World Police would see to that from their Polar Base where the alphabet bombs were stored. Such a nation would simply cease to exist.

But what if the disease could be made selective? And, better still, what if the disease didn't appear to be that at all?

Sucamari thought that he had found the answer.

He sat in his legation and dreamed the old dreams of conquest. Not the old-fashioned conquest of treasure and slaves, but the new, infinitely more valuable conquest of land. Empty land. Living space for the teeming millions which surged and pressed in the Orient, increasing their already fabulous numbers with the passing of each hour. War was bad, he admitted that. War was wasteful, and now the world could not afford waste of any description. But a quiet elimination of peoples was something else.

Sucamari leaned back in his chair, his face for once devoid of its shielding smile. He was no national hero, no official agent, but he was far more dangerous than either. In a way, he was one

of the most dangerous types of men on Earth. He was an idealistic fanatic, a man who was so firmly convinced that he was right that he would stop at literally nothing to gain his own ends. And though he worked for the benefit of the Orient he knew that his own government would be the first to punish him should a hint of what he intended leak out.

Fortunately for the world such men were few, and those in high positions fewer still. In all the Orient only he and a handful of the true Samurai, the old warrior class of Japan, dreamed the dream of bloodless victory which would give the world to the East.

A bell chimed from the wall-clock and he started, checking the time against his watch. It was later than he had thought. Rising, he entered the outer office. Nagati, his eternal book on his lap, waited in the anteroom. He straightened as Sucamari crossed to the desk and opened a drawer.

"It is gone." He spoke in Japanese.

"Good." Despite his aide's assurance, Sucamari checked for himself. "Later today you will contact the Asian Antique shop and inform them that there has been a mistake. Early tomorrow you will recover the parcel and do what you have to do. Be sure and return in time for your normal duties." He glanced at his watch

again. "What time did Janice leave?"

"Early; she was gone before we arrived from the chamber." Nagati frowned as if something troubled him. "There is something wrong with that girl. She works as if in a dream and I have had to speak to her about it." His fingers drummed on the cover of his book. "Was it wise to send her with the parcel?"

"What else? Janice is an American by birth even though she is of mixed descent, and, to the World Council, above suspicion. Had you or I taken the parcel someone may have noted the incident and remembered it at a later date. Senators and their personal aides do not act as beasts of burden. To do so would have been to act out of routine, and at all costs we must avoid suspicion. Janice, a mere office employee, would not have aroused comment."

Nagati remained silent. It had been he who, while Sucamari remained in the public eye at Hainan, had travelled a hundred uncomfortable miles to pick up the package. Who had left it where he found it, he didn't know. How many lives had been lost in preparing it he didn't think about. The Orient was vast and the World Police couldn't be everywhere. Experiments could be conducted and men die and be disposed of without an automatic investigation. Not as in the Occident, where the police were everywhere, and all

research was confined to approved laboratories regularly inspected.

But he did know that the secret laboratory had been obliterated and all trace of the effort needed to produce what the box contained lost for ever. Even the scientists who had bred the bacteria were probably dead and disposed of. The Samurai who had acted in the matter were as fanatical in their way as Sucamari in his. Death, their own or that of others, was not important against the greater threat.

For there must be no question of retaliation against the Orient. "We shall check," said Sucamari. "You will phone from a public booth outside." He donned his smile and led the way from the legation.

Sucamari lived in the old Japanese Consulate on 5th Avenue, not too far from the World Council Buildings and, if a man didn't mind crowds, a pleasant enough walk. Sucamari didn't like crowds, not the noisy, jostling, ill-mannered crowds found in the Occident. He demanded transport at the controller's desk and waited patiently for a turbine car to come from the garage to drive him home. Nagati, declining the offer of transport, decided to walk.

He broke his journey at two different videophone booths, but even so arrived at the Consulate at the same time as the senator.

"Janice did not deliver the parcel," he said when they were alone in the study. "The Asian Antique shop have not received it."

"Have you contacted her?"

"I tried to. She has not returned to her lodgings." Nagati paced the carpeted floor. "I don't like this," he said. "She was ordered to deliver the parcel and has not done so." He halted and stared at the senator. "Could she have been a spy?"

"For whom? Rayburn?" Sucamari looked thoughtful. "It is possible, of course; all things are possible, but I doubt it. Rayburn has spies, that we know, but I should say Janice is not one of them." He sat motionless, staring before him. "We must find her. Phone her again."

"From here?"

"Yes. If she answers mention some trivial matter. Hurry!" His tension betrayed itself by a thin film of moisture on his forehead. He wiped at it, annoyed with himself for the betrayal. He must remain calm. He must stand outside events and watch them, taking no emotional part so that, by his attitude, he could control the things affecting others. He was a chess player moving pawns and remaining unaffected by their loss. Nagati cut the connection and shook his head.

"She isn't at her lodgings."

"I see." An Occidental would have sworn. Sucamari did not

swear. He rose to his feet. "We must trace her, and quickly. Get the car."

"In the city?" Nagati had had some experience of traffic conditions. "Wouldn't a cab be better?"

"No." Sucamari didn't bother to explain why. He waited until the aide had left the room and, from a rosewood cabinet, took a needle gun. It was more a work of art than a practical weapon, but it held a clip of twenty darts, each no more than a millimetre thick, and each dart was tipped with an anæsthetic paste. One dart would knock a big man groggy, more would render him unconscious, ten would be fatal.

Sucamari slipped the weapon into his pocket and went outside to where the car waited with Nagati at the wheel.

Janice lived on the edge of Chinatown, sharing a bachelor room with another Eurasian girl. It was a pleasant enough room with printed curtains and lacquered prints on the walls. Nagati, interviewing Janice's room-mate, first spoke in his native tongue then switched to English when he saw that she didn't understand.

"Pardon the intrusion," he said politely. "You are Pearl?"

"That's me, brother." Pearl was a thorough American despite her slanted eyes and saffron skin. "You know me?"

"Janice has often spoken of you." Nagati hesitated. "It is important that I find Janice, and quickly. A matter connected with some urgent work, you understand. Where would she be?"

"No idea." Pearl lit a cigarette. "She didn't come home, that's for sure. Maybe she had a date with her boy friend."

"You have his address?"

"No, but I've got his vid number. Janice was always calling him and she wrote the number on the wall." She pointed to a pencilled scrawl. "See? Even got a heart drawn around it." She clucked her tongue against her teeth. "Poor Janice, she sure has it bad."

"Phone the number and see if she is there," ordered Nagati. "If she is not, then find out where she could be, the address and any other information." He smiled to take the sharpness from his words. "The matter is urgent," he explained. "I would not like to see Janice lose her employment."

"Like that, is it?" Pearl took the money Nagati offered her, raised her eyebrows at the sum, and ran downstairs to the video-phone. When she returned her face was flaming. "Lousy bitch! The landlady, I mean, she . . ." Pearl broke off. "Never mind. I guess I can stand that sort of talk for Janice." She held out a scrap of paper. "I wrote down the address. Janice isn't there. Her

boyfriend's name is Baylis; he's a messenger at the World Council, but he isn't home, either."

"Thank you." Nagati hurried back to the car and gave Sucamari the information. The senator stared thoughtfully through the windscreen.

"A messenger," he said softly. "I wonder?"

"Rayburn?" Nagati had followed the other's train of thought. "Someone making up to Janice so as to spy on us?"

"Emotions are unpredictable," reminded Sucamari. "How would Rayburn know that his agent would appeal to our little office worker?" He beat his hand softly against his knee. "What great emotion would have made Janice forget her duties? Love? Perhaps, and not a smooth passion but an uneasy one. Either she has taken the parcel with her to some rendezvous intending to deliver it later or she has given it to someone else to deliver. Baylis? Perhaps. Or perhaps she opened it and . . ."

"The value was not high," interrupted Nagati. "Hardly sufficient to tempt a thief."

"A person in love is not logical," reminded Sucamari. "It is possible that Janice needed money desperately. And you are wrong about the value of the parcel. Here in the Occident there are many collectors of antiques who would pay a large

sum for such an item." He came to a decision. "We will call on this Baylis."

Baylis lived in a cubicle in a human rabbit warren. Fancy clothes, scattered toilet articles, a big telly set and a store of empty bottles showed the way his money went. Nagati wrinkled his nose at the scent of masculine perfume, his eyes sharp as he stared around the cubicle.

"You a cop?" The landlady, a big, blousy female with straggling hair and pig eyes, licked her lips with anticipation. "What's he done this time?"

"It's a personal matter," said Nagati. "I am trying to locate a young lady; maybe you have met her? A Eurasian, a person of mixed blood," he explained. "A pretty girl with slanted eyes and . . ."

"The Chink. I know her." The woman bobbed her head, indifferent to the fact that Nagati, by his appearance, was also a "Chink." "You her old man?"

"No, just a friend."

"Tough on you then," she sniggered. "Real gone on wonder boy she is. Keeps phoning and getting real desperate." She laughed with coarse humour. "Don't need much to guess why."

"Has she been here? This evening, I mean?"

"No. She called though and

wonder boy dressed up and went out somewhere. Guess they've got things to talk about." She wiped the back of her fleshy hand across her mouth. "But if he thinks that he can bring her back here after they're married, if they get married, he's got another think coming. I don't want my lodgers upset by arguing couples and whining kids. I run a respectable house I do, and I'm going to keep it that way. So . . ."

"I understand," said Nagati quickly. He stared at the big Perbox standing in one corner. "Would you have a master key to that?"

"To his box?" She looked offended. "Say, what sort of a woman do you think I am? A snooper? Let me tell you, mister, there's never been a complaint yet about the way I run my house."

"I'm sure there hasn't." Nagati pulled out his wallet and showed her a five hundred dollar bill. "It would be worth this to me just for one look inside that box," he hinted. "And your silence about my visit, naturally." The note crackled between his fingers. "Now, if you should happen to have a master key?"

She did. She simply jammed her thumb against the lock and pulled open the door.

"Some folks are dumb," she snickered. "I slipped a couple-plate in this box when he first came; one print for him, one for

me. Funny how some so-called smart guys never seem to think of that."

Nagati couldn't blame the absent Baylis for not thinking about it. Changing the locks on the standard Perboxes without damaging the manufacturer's seal wasn't easy. The landlady, obviously, had had help. He glanced at the specifications on the lock; it was a single. A couple-plate shouldn't have fitted it. The change had cost money and was illegal. Why the woman had done it he couldn't guess. Curiosity, perhaps. Some people will do anything to satisfy their curiosity. Nagati shrugged; it was none of his business. Neither, as it turned out, were the contents of the box.

Sucamari heard the news in silence.

"We've got to get it back," said Nagati. "What if I went to the police and reported the theft of a parcel, describing the contents as that of the one Janice is supposed to have delivered?"

"To do that would be to start an investigation we cannot afford." Sucamari half-closed his eyes as he leaned back in his seat. "The whole point is that we dare not admit ownership of the parcel and what it contains."

"Why not?" Nagati was troubled. "It is perfectly safe as it is. The statue, even, can be handled without fear. No one

needs to know what the coating contains."

"You underestimate the Health Army and the World Police." Sucamari was abrupt; he had already thought all this out a dozen times before. "The culture, I admit, is dormant and will only spring to life when in contact with the right medium, such as blood or natural saliva. But that isn't the point. Secrecy in this matter is our only safeguard. To go to the police is to throw away that safeguard."

"Then what shall we do?"

"We wait. Eventually we shall contact Janice and discover what she did with the parcel. At the same time I will circulate my interest in Oriental works of art among the dealers in the city. If it has been stolen we may recover it that way." He gave a short laugh.

"Strange, Nagati, how even the best laid plans can be upset by a trifle. A girl who is desperately in love forgets her duties and the work of fifteen years is threatened with oblivion. It almost makes you believe in fate."

Nagati didn't answer; he wasn't superstitious.

VIII

DOCTOR JAMES ARMSTRIDGE WAS a tall, slender man with a mane of thick white hair and a pair

of firm yet gentle hands. He checked the reading on the portable electrocardiograph, jotted down his findings, then removed the electrodes from Rayburn's torso.

"That's all, Jack. You can get dressed now."

"How am I doing?" Rayburn, big, stocky, his barrel chest covered with a thick mat of hair, paused as he zipped his shirt. "How long have I got?"

"That depends." Armridge pursed his lips in the age-old manner of medical men who are asked more than they consider they should tell. "I wish that you'd come down to the hospital for a thorough check-up. There are some laboratory tests I'd like to make with non-portable equipment."

"Quit stalling, Jim." Rayburn spoke with the familiarity of an old friend. "How long can I keep going without ruining my chances?"

"Not long." Armridge put away his instruments, fitting them neatly into their lined cases. He didn't look at the senator.

"This is serious, Jim." Rayburn adjusted his jacket, selected a cigar from a box on his desk, lit it and inhaled with slow deliberation. "I want to know how long I've got. Five years? Ten? How long?"

"I can't tell you that." Arm-

ridge snapped shut the final case. "No doctor can. You can't measure life with a clock, Jack, there are too many variables." He helped himself to a cigar. "Your heart isn't as sound as it should be for a man of your age, and your arteries are showing signs of progressive hardening. Catabolism has accelerated and your reflexes aren't anything to be proud of. You're an old man, Jack."

"I know that. I've lived a long time. Now, how about answering my question?"

"You haven't got ten years, Jack. Maybe five, but certainly not ten." Armridge lit the cigar, using a gas-lighter and taking his time over the operation. "My advice is that you make preparations to take the treatment during the next six months."

"Are you talking as a doctor or as a friend?"

"Both." Armridge settled himself in his chair. "Let's face it, Jack, you're no longer young. You've been driving yourself too hard and now you've got to pay for it. You may last another few years, but if you do, it will be because dope is keeping you alive." He inhaled with obvious enjoyment. "Good cigar, Jack. Havana?"

"Yes."

"Didn't think they made them any more." Armridge sniffed at

the brown cylinder. "Most tobacco now is hydroponic grown. These must have cost you plenty."

"Forget the cigars." Rayburn was impatient. "What about me?"

"Do you want me to lie to you, Jack?" Armridge was serious. "The treatment is good, but not that good. Take it in time and you've nothing to worry about; leave it too late and you won't be able to assimilate the serum. It will kill you."

"It may do that, anyway," said Rayburn. "At the best I've only forty-nine chances out of fifty."

"The two per cent. death rate?" Armridge shrugged. "Percentages can mean what you want them to mean. You think that out of every hundred people applying for the treatment two fail to make it. Right?"

"What else?"

"You're forgetting the age groups. From forty to fifty, providing health is good, there is no death rate. From fifty to sixty, again if health is good, it is about one tenth of one per cent. From sixty to seventy there is a jump to an average of one per cent. Over seventy things begin to get out of hand." Armridge flicked ash into a tray. "Most of it has to do with the actual physical age, not the chronological age. A man can be young in body even though he has lived a long time, and, of course, you can get the reverse."

"So the longer a man waits the less his chances of coming through alive?"

"Yes." Armridge lifted the hand holding the cigar and pointed with it. "Now, before you start blowing your top, let me tell you a couple of things. We haven't publicised this for the obvious reason that we don't want every forty-year-old demanding the treatment. A man is in his prime at forty and he's got a family to raise before he can think of retiring. On the other hand, we do tell all those who are getting near the danger point that it's time they made their arrangements. Most of them ignore the recommendation. That's where you get your two per cent. death rate from."

"Are you trying to frighten me, Jim?"

"I'm telling you the facts." Armridge was curt. "As a friend, I'd like to see you survive the treatment; as a doctor, it would be best if you didn't. We've too many people as it is," he explained. "Medical science and antibiotics have kept people alive who normally would have died. Add to that the stoppage of natural death and you've got a headache."

"I know it," said Rayburn. "Blue should have had more sense. He should have used his discretion."

"That old argument?" Arm-

ridge shrugged. "Personally, I can't think of anything worse than living in a society ruled by immortal despots. Blue knew what he was doing. The great pity is that he died when he took his own serum. He was an old man, physically old, and it killed him." He stared at Rayburn. "The same as it will kill you if you wait too long."

Rayburn sighed and stared at the tip of his cigar. Logically, a man would be a fool to wait too long, but since when have men been logical? And what man, ever, has consciously accepted the fact that he must die? There was simply too much to do before a man could take the treatment. The majority had no choice; they had to keep working as long as they could, both in order to provide for others and for themselves. A man stayed in the commercial rat-race as long as he could to store wealth against the time he must accept legal death. Himself? "We've known each other a long time, Jim," he said quietly. "I respect you as a doctor and appreciate you as a friend. But I can't take your advice. There is still too much for me to do before I drop out of the picture."

"Politics?" Armridge was contemptuous. "It's a disease, Jack, as much a disease as cancer used to be. The lust for power grips you. The desire to beat the other

man, to be the big fish in the pond. But, when you look at it, what's it all about? A hundred years from now things will be just the same, one faction striving to get the edge on the other, men shifting their loyalties from one party to the next." He shook his head. "Take my advice, get out while you're safe."

"Quit? And then what?" Rayburn dragged at his cigar. "To spend the rest of my life in a Restezce Home? To watch while fools make a mess of the world? Or perhaps I could scratch around and sell my political knowledge to the man who will take my place? No thanks!" Sparks flew as he ground the cigar to ruin.

"Take it easy, Jack," said Armridge softly. "It comes to us all."

"Does it?" Rayburn was bitter. "No, Jim, you're wrong. It's easy for you to talk. What have you to lose by taking the treatment? All right, so you'll be declared legally dead, but what does that mean to you? You'll lose your right to vote, to own property, your present situation. You'll make a will and your heirs will inherit just as if you had really died. But when you come to it, what will you really lose? Not your skill, the very thing which has given you all you own. Not your knowledge; you'll still have a trade and the right to practice it anywhere in the world.

Knowledge, Jim, that's your safeguard. But what have I got?"

"Complaining, Jack?"

"You can call it that. I've made my life and I don't regret it. I'm not whining at the regulations, but I am complaining because those regulations rob the country of the experience it needs." Impatience overpowered him and he rose, pacing the floor with jerky strides, his entire body a quivering dynamo of restlessness. "Damn it, Jim! There's still so much to be done."

"Relax, Jack, you're beating your head against a wall." Armridge smiled at his friend. "Why don't you accept the inevitable? You're not poor and can make arrangements to spend your life in comfort. I know that you've set your heart on power, but you can't keep it for always. The people won't allow it."

"The people!" Rayburn paused in his striding and sat down at his desk. "The people, Jim, are sheep. They follow the man with the loud voice and believe that he is doing what they want him to do instead of the reverse. People, in the mass, are fools."

"Because they don't want to restore nationalism?" Armridge set down his cigar. "I'm not an old man, Jack, but I'm capable of a long-term view just the same. Every generation breeds someone like you; someone with the gift of rousing the rabble, a man who

sincerely believes that he has a great mission in the world, and who honestly thinks that he is the only man with the right answers. Such men are dangerous. They are the prime cause of war."

"So I'm a warmonger," said Rayburn. "Is that why you advised me to take the treatment?"

"In a way, yes."

"So it appears that I can no longer rely on your medical advice."

"You wouldn't rely on it anyway." Armridge wasn't annoyed. "You'd be a fool if you did. You've probably been checked by other physicians before you sent for me, and the betting is that at least one of them was a Blue. Am I correct?"

Rayburn remained silent

"You don't have to answer," chuckled Armridge. "Only a man both stupid and poor would pick a young medico when he could go to a man with a century of experience behind him." He chuckled again. "Thanks for the patronage, anyway."

"Age does not automatically bring wisdom," said Rayburn, but didn't believe it even as he said it. He lit a fresh cigar. "What is your picture of the political field?"

"Your part in it?" Armridge picked up his cigar and puffed it into glowing life. "On the face of it you are trying to win a

following among our own people by appealing to their patriotism, shrewdly pointing out the taxes we are paying for the immediate benefit of the Orient and using all the old tricks of tub-thumping, semantic phraseology and the rest. The reason?" Armridge looked thoughtful. "Aside from winning popular support for its own sake, I can only assume that, if you demand secession from the World Council, your following will be large enough to force the motion through." He chuckled at the concept then, as he stared at Rayburn, grew serious.

"Secession," he said. "But why? Because you want to be a bigger fish in a smaller pond? Or because you want to get everything neatly tied up before you take the treatment?" He shook his head. "No point in that. Once you take it you automatically finish with politics. Unless?" He sat upright, his eyes startled. "If we secede from the Council," he said slowly. "And if you could force through a motion to restore civil liberties to the Blues, then you wouldn't have to lose your power. You'd be firm in the saddle, an immortal at the head of government. Is that it, Jack?"

Rayburn didn't answer.

"It fits," said Armridge wonderingly. "By God, it fits! A dictatorship with you at the head. Rayburn, you fool! Do you know what you're doing?"

"Doing?" Rayburn smiled through the smoke of his cigar. "Aren't you jumping to a few extreme conclusions, Jim?"

"Yes, I guess I am." Armridge sounded relieved. "It wouldn't work anyway; you'd be pushing against too much dead weight. People aren't willing to follow a man who threatens their immortality."

"There would be no threat," said Rayburn. "Assuming that you're right, of course. The people would stand to gain, not lose."

"You'd be offering nationalism and a to-hell-with-the-rest philosophy which would ruin us if we tried to enforce it." Armridge was very emphatic. "Damn it, Jack, don't you know how much we are envied as it is? We still have some living space and the natural resources and technology to make the most of it. We could get by and let the rest of the world go their own merry way to hell, but we daren't do it. Envy could so easily turn into hate and, if we secede, we'd wake up one fine day with bombs on our doorstep. And don't mention the World Police; they wouldn't be able to stop it, not if the rest of the world ganged up on us." He stared seriously at the senator. "Don't try it, Jack. Secession would only mean trouble."

"You think I could?" Rayburn

was eager. "Do you really think I could?"

"No." Armridge relaxed. "Of course you couldn't. Conditions aren't right for talk of secession, anyway." He chuckled. "Speculations like that can sometimes get out of hand." He glanced at his watch. "It's late! I've got to get moving." He rose to his feet. "Now take my advice, Jack, and don't leave it too late."

After the doctor had gone Rayburn sat alone in his study and stared before him. He lived in what was almost a relic, an unconverted house on the edge of what had, a long time ago, been a fashionable part of the town. Now it was an oasis of privacy in a quarter where privacy was almost unknown. He was thinking of the doctor and what he had said.

He had been right, too right for comfort, and Rayburn felt a brief panic at the thought that he could be so transparent. It had taken years of careful jockeying to reach his present position, but the goal was worth the effort. Immortality and eternal power! It was the old dream of every petty ruler and king through the whole history brought up to date. And it was possible, so possible that it was almost reality. But he needed a little more time before he could blossom into the acknowledged saviour of his country.

Once he did that, the rest would follow.

Rayburn sat back in his chair feeling the frustration he knew so well. Intangibles, the hints of hidden purposes which so swiftly resolved themselves into nothingness. And how could he confide to anyone the motivating force of his ambition? What, for example, would Armridge have said had he told him that he feared a monstrous plot by the Orient against the Occident, and especially against the Americas? The doctor would have laughed and said that the senator was justifying his desire for power. Or he would have scorned the concept and demanded proof.

And Rayburn had no proof.

Not unless statistics were proof. Not unless the barely-veiled envy he had seen so often in the eyes of men he had talked with in the Asian countries could be called proof. Not unless full credence was given to his own, intangible fears. And yet, when it came to it, what did he have to fear?

A creeping line on a graph. A population index which mounted and mounted and showed no signs of ever leaving the rising curve. All countries could show such a figure, but where for years the Occident had practised some measure of birth control, the Orient never had. They had started with the bulk of the

world's population and they had increased their lead. They were a dead weight against modern progress with their adherence to their old ways of life.

Rayburn sighed, his head spinning with figures as it always did when he concentrated on the problem. In less than seventy years the Occidental population had doubled, then, when it was obvious that someone would have to support the legally dead Blues, it had risen again. Now it was treble what it had been a hundred years ago. In fifty years time?

Rayburn didn't know, but on one thing he was certain. Food was already a problem and the position was getting worse all the time. Already there had been cases of actual starvation and tremendous numbers of people in the Orient were living at a subsistence level. He had never underestimated the survival instinct and, to him, it was the clearest logic that a starving man will try and get food. And if a man, then why not a nation? Sooner or later the peace maintained by the World Police would crumble in a desperate scramble for living space.

And of all nations the Americas were the most fortunately situated, the most glittering prize. Rayburn knew that the time was coming when, to survive at all, they must hit first, hit hard, and make the first blow the last. If

they did not, then they would fall beneath the might of the Orient.

A strong man could save the Americas, and Rayburn felt himself to be that man. He would gain eternal power, yes, but he had no choice. First the power, then the safeguarding of his nation. It was the only way and, when the people realised the truth, they would thank him.

But time was running out.

Rayburn felt panic as he thought about it. If he were to gain power, then he would have to act fast. But before he could act he needed proof. He had to have something, some grain of undeniable fact, so that he could demand an investigation and prove to the public that they were in actual physical danger from the Orient. Then, when they were aroused, he would demand secession and they would agree. From then it was but a step to total power with the Blue vote restored and solidly behind him. Then, the elimination of potential danger and . . .

For a moment he sat, engrossed in his dreams, then reality dragged him back to Earth. Armridge had warned him that his time was running out. If the dream was ever to become more than a dream he must act without further loss of time.

But he had to have proof.

IX

THE POLICEMAN WHO HAD BEEN with Augustine when he had collapsed had worn gloves and had only touched his clothing. The internes in the ambulance, the nurses and doctors at the hospital had followed normal aseptic procedures in that everyone in contact with the patient had worn skin-gloves, a transparent flexible plastic which was sprayed on and dissolved off in an antiseptic solution vibrated with bacteria-destroying ultra-sonics and irradiated with ultra violet. The doctors conducting the autopsy had worn the regulation cover-skis. It was, as Jelks said, the most fantastic good luck.

"If anyone else had touched him or attended to him we'd have been in real trouble." His face on the videophone screen was expressive. "As it is I've got three nurses, the ambulance staff, the cop, two doctors and myself in quarantine. Fortunately, I made my own lab tests and I think that we've got it under control."

"So it was disease, not natural heart trouble." Sam felt invisible hands grip his stomach as he thought about it. "What is the disease?"

"I don't know." Jelks shrugged at Sam's expression. "It's a new one on me, Sam. All I can tell you is that Augustine's blood was full of a bacteria foreign to his normal

metabolism. I can't give it a name and I don't know just what it may do. The only certain thing is that it causes coagulation of the blood. My guess is that it does it by increasing the thrombin content, but it could be by some other means. I'm still working on it."

"How soon will you know?"

"Give me time, Sam. The human body isn't what I would call a simple mechanism."

"Sorry, of course you're working as fast as you can. Anything I can do?"

"I don't think so. I've got all the help I can use." Jelks sucked in his cheeks. "There are a couple of things I can tell you. Examination of Augustine's body revealed a small cut on the ball of his left thumb. It was a fresh wound, probably done just before he collapsed. Experiments with the bacteria show that, when starved, it becomes dormant and then will explode into life when in contact with blood. Human blood, incidentally, not animal. It also shows signs of being anærobic."

"Anærobic." Sam breathed a sigh of relief. "That's some help."

"You think so?" Jelks wasn't so pleased. "Admittedly, the bacteria can't live in the presence of free oxygen, but don't underestimate it on that account. We had a hard enough job stamping out other anærobic bacteria which plagued us for centuries. And this particular culture is tough. Once

active it can be transmitted by skin contact and oral assimilation. Moisture from the mouth and even perspiration can transmit it." He took a deep breath. "Fortunately Augustine collapsed in the presence of the police, but we don't know how long he was infected, or how many people he may have contacted."

"What is the incubation period?" Sam asked the important question.

"Pretty quick. Rough tests have shown that a single bacteria, once in direct contact with human blood, will multiply fast enough to cause fatal clotting within twenty-four hours."

"Then Augustine needn't have had the disease for that long. If he was infected with a big dose, say via that cut on his thumb, he could have collapsed long before the twenty-four hour period." Sam stared at the image of Jelks. "Am I talking sense?"

"Yes. If a large colony of the bacteria were introduced directly into the bloodstream and then the subject had some violent exercise, the resultant blood clot would be swiftly carried to the heart. A small clot would pass, but a larger one would kill." Jelks tried to rub his chin, then cursed as the cover-skin he was wearing prevented the gesture. "Damn these things. I'll be glad when I can take it off."

"When will that be?"

"If I'm not dead in another couple of hours, then I won't die at all." Jelks grinned through the paper-thin, impermeable plastic. "The trouble is that I can't smoke, and when you've been cooped up in one of these things for over twenty-four hours, brother, you need a smoke." He became serious. "It adds up at that. The small clots would cause pain and bring collapse. The hospital here had diagnosed thrombosis before I arrived, that's why they bypassed the heart with an exciter. Normally, that, coupled with the filtering of the blood, would have done the trick. The trouble was that the blood turned almost solid; we just couldn't filter it fast enough. We tried plasma and whole blood transfusions, but that only delayed the inevitable. You can't wash a human body free of bacteria."

"So, from what you know about it, Augustine need only have been infected a short while before his collapse. Is that correct?"

"That's about it." Jelks looked shrewd. "What's on your mind, Sam?"

"Nothing much, just kicking odd thoughts around." He smiled at the doctor. "Let me know when you have more information."

"I will, if you'll do the same." Jelks hesitated. "I sent a medhyp over to the Augustines," he said. "No need to let them suffer the

pain of grief. Hope that you don't mind?"

"Why should I mind?" Sam felt guilty at not having thought of it himself. "Thanks, anyway. Bill me for the service, not the family."

"It's on the house." Jelks became thoughtful. "Nice looking girl, Carmen."

"Very nice." Sam changed the subject. "Don't forget to call when you get anything." He cut the connection and stared thoughtfully at the blank screen.

The fear hadn't left him; if anything it had increased. He was thinking of twenty million people crammed into a city designed for only a third of that number. Overcrowding meant unsanitary conditions and close personal contact. If disease was loose in the city then everything was in its favour for rapid dissemination.

The control of disease was the task of the Health Army under Colonel Lanridge, and they would know what to do. Notification from the hospital would have been automatic and already the mobile units would be standing by ready to rush to any point to enforce quarantine. There was really nothing for Sam to worry about and, officially, nothing for him to do. Yet he had the nagging conviction that the problem was more his concern than that of the doctors.

He looked up as Mike called to him from the intercom.

"Senator Rayburn is on his way to see you, sir." The secretary did not seem unduly impressed by the prospect of a personal visit from the big man. "He'll be here within a few minutes." Sam nodded and was working at some papers when Rayburn entered the office. The senator came directly to the object of his visit.

"I have been informed that one of our messengers died under suspicious circumstances," he said abruptly. "I want to know the results of your investigations."

"Do you?" Sam offered the senator a chair. "May I ask the reason for your interest?"

It was a fair question, but one which Rayburn couldn't honestly answer. Augustine had been Rayburn's paid spy though the messenger hadn't known for whom he had worked. There was nothing strange in that. Rayburn had, over the years, built up his own intelligence service with extensions into every department he considered of importance. Anything even remotely connected with the Orient was, to him, important. He sought refuge in telling, not all the truth, but in a part of it.

"My interest has to do with the common weal." Rayburn sat on the proffered chair. He was perspiring and his breathing was ragged. He looked, Sam thought, a sick man. Politely, he waited for

the senator to elaborate. "I think that he was murdered," said Rayburn. "I think that he was killed by the enemies of our nation."

"Do we have enemies?"

"You know what I mean," snapped Rayburn. "And I'll thank you not to bandy words with me. I demand that you make the fullest possible investigation into the death of this unfortunate man and that I be notified as to the results of your investigation." He paused for breath. "I need hardly remind you that, as the representative of the Mid-Western Americas, I am in a position to demand your co-operation in this matter."

"I am aware of your position," said Sam quietly. "There is no need for you to make demands." He did not remind the senator of the fact that the World Police, like the Civil Service of some countries, was independent of the Council itself. Senators came and went, but the basic organisation remained unchanged. Rayburn could storm and rave, but he was powerless to alter that organisation. Only a full session of the Council could do that. But he was entitled to make his request.

"I can give you what information I have," said Sam carefully. "Augustine was directed by his controller to report to the Australian legation. He exchanged duties with another messenger named Baylis, who had been ordered to the Japanese legation.

We can assume that he reported to that legation. He then left the building carrying a parcel. I saw him myself. That was the last time I saw him."

"The parcel." Rayburn was quick to pounce. "Was it from the Japanese legation?"

"Apparently not. They deny any knowledge of it."

"Check it."

"I already have."

"Check it again."

Rayburn was not to be put off. Sam reached for the phone. The senator stayed to one side, out of range of the scanners, and stared at the screen. It blurred then cleared as Nagati's image resolved itself in full colour.

"Yes?"

"Sorry to trouble you again, sir," said Sam. "But it's about this Augustine business. There is a question about the parcel he was carrying when he left the building. We know that he was supposed to report to your legation, and it is reasonable to assume that he was sent on an errand by someone connected with you. Could you clarify the matter?"

"I'm afraid not." Nagati's smile was artificial. "I have told you all this before, captain. Neither Senator Sucamari nor myself have any knowledge of the matter."

"But your staff?" Sam was

insistent. "Have you questioned them?"

"I have. All deny either seeing this man or having sent for him."

"I see. Thank you." Sam cut the connection and re-called the switchboard. "Get me Courier Control." He waited. "About that call from the Japanese legation. That's right, the one which Baylis should have answered but didn't. Can you remember who sent it? A girl? Did you know her? Yes, I know you told me all this before, but I want to make sure. She was a member of the legation staff. She had contacted you many times before. Thank you." The screen flickered into blankness as Sam looked at Rayburn.

"They're lying," said the senator. "The Nips are lying."

"Someone's lying," admitted Sam. "But Nagati could have been telling the truth. The person, whoever it is, could have sent for a messenger without his knowledge and now be afraid to admit it." He frowned at the videophone. "It's odd though. People who send parcels usually like to know that they have been delivered. Augustine had a parcel, I saw it, but apparently he got it from thin air and it's vanished into the same place."

"His receipt book," suggested Rayburn. "Does that help?"

"He hadn't filled it in."

"Then they must be lying, and they wouldn't do that without a

reason. Those damn Nips killed him!"

"Steady." Sam was surprised at the other's vehemence. "It's odd, I'll admit, but there's not the slightest suspicion that they would either want to kill him, or did so."

"That's your opinion." Rayburn heaved himself to his feet. Unlike the captain, he had a shrewd idea as to why Augustine could have been murdered. In the intricate game of spy and counter-spy, agents are considered expendable. If Augustine had stumbled on something important and dangerous to the Orient, then his death was logical. Rayburn gritted his teeth at the thought that perhaps he had missed obtaining the proof he so badly needed by so small a margin. His only hope now was that a thorough investigation would reveal it.

"I know what I think," he said heavily, "and I won't rest until I find out the truth. That man was murdered and I want to know just how and why." He paused by the door. "I expect quick results, captain. The future of our country may depend on it."

There was silence for a while after he had left the office, then Mike, forgetful of the respect he should have had but hadn't, snorted his contempt.

"Old fool! He's got enemies on the brain."

"He's lived a long time," said

Sam quietly. Mike flushed beneath the reproof.

"Sorry, sir, but he is a little stupid."

"To whom? To us, maybe. To himself? I doubt it. Rayburn is sincere and, even if we don't agree with his conclusions, we must respect his sincerity." Sam rose to his feet and brushed down his tunic. "But you're right in one thing—he'll give us no rest until we've cleared up the mystery. Hold the fort. If you want me I'll be down in Personnel, then at the Japanese legation."

Personnel held the records of all who had worked or did work for the World Council. It was a large place and would have been larger if it hadn't been for the computers which took care of the records. Sam wrote out an authorisation, waited until a girl took it to the appropriate authority, then had to explain himself to that individual in person.

"I want a file of all employees of the Japanese legation, with photographs. Official business, and hurry."

While waiting for the computers to scan the files, select the wanted records and copy them, together with photographs, Sam called through to courier control.

"I want you to stand by on this line," he ordered. "I'm going to show you some photographs and I

want you to pick the one of the girl who sent for Augustine, Baylis rather. Understand?"

The man did. His memory was good and his job had developed his memory for faces. He identified Janice without hesitation. "That's the one."

"Are you certain as to that? Certain enough to swear to it?"

"I'm certain." The man was curious and would have asked questions, but Sam cut the connection. He had no time for idle curiosity; he had questions to ask of his own.

Nagati received him with strained politeness.

"Really, captain, while we all know you have your duties to attend to, isn't this getting rather monotonous? Three times now I have answered your questions. Should I write them all down together with the answers?" He was ironic, but Sam didn't let it bother him.

"The pursuit of knowledge is the asking of many questions," he said. He held out the file he had obtained from Personnel. "I would like to speak with this young lady."

"Janice?" Nagati glanced sharply at the captain. "May I ask why?"

"You may. From information received I have reason to believe that this person is the one who summoned the dead messenger. If you will call her, please?"

"But this is ridiculous!" Nagati gestured with his hands. "What possible connection can she have had with the unfortunate death of that man?"

"Probably none," admitted Sam. "But police work is the gathering of many details. Most of them are quite irrelevant, some fit into the general pattern, a few are essential, but all are important in that they fill in the general picture."

"But surely you do not go to all this trouble every time a man dies from natural causes?" Nagati was genuinely amazed.

"Augustine did not die from natural causes," said Sam evenly. "The girl, if you please."

"I am sorry, but you cannot see her."

"Cannot?" Sam raised his eyebrows. He had battled with diplomatic privilege before. "May I remind you that the girl is a national and does not come under the protection of your legation?" He did not add that, where the World Police were concerned, there was no such thing as diplomatic privilege.

"Please do not misunderstand me, captain." Nagati was all apologies. "I would be only too pleased to summon her, but, unfortunately, she is not here." He gestured again with his hands. "She did not report for work today, or yesterday. When she does she will be dismissed."



"I see." Sam frowned for a moment in thought. "Have you any idea where she could be found?"

"None."

"Thank you." Arguing, Sam knew, was waste of time. The aide was either lying or telling the truth. In either case he would have to find the girl by normal police methods.

Nagati, after the captain had gone, stood a long moment before entering the inner office. Sucamari glanced sharply at his aide.

"Something wrong?"

"The police were enquiring about Janice. The captain wants to find her."

"I see." Sucamari toyed with a scrap of carved jade which he used as a paper weight. "Will he find her?"

"No." Nagati didn't elaborate, and Sucamari was glad that he didn't. Both he and the aide knew that there was only one sure way of stopping a person's mouth, but he was civilized enough not to want to think about it. Nagati wasn't thinking of the girl; he had other news. "The messenger who took the parcel did not die of natural causes," he said. "The police captain was careless and told me so."

"Careless, indifferent, or shrewd?" Sucamari never made the mistake of underestimating his

enemies. "Not that it matters. Without proof his suspicions, if any, are harmless to us. How did the messenger die?"

"Rumour has it that he collapsed from heart failure." Nagati looked grim. "Now we know that he did not die from 'natural causes. It could not have been accidental. The man was a spy, probably working for Rayburn, and he must have opened the parcel. There is no other way to account for his death and the interest of the police."

"If he contracted the disease, and we aren't sure yet that he did, then he must have broken the outer seal of the culture." Sucamari rose from his desk and stared out of the window. Before him the terraced buildings of the city reared towards the sky. He stood there for a long time before turning back to the office. "There is nothing we can do now but wait," he said. "I have already spread word among the dealers that I am interested in ivory Buddhas in inlaid boxes. There is nothing more we can do."

He moved towards the door as the recall signal chimed for his presence in the assembly chamber.

X

GERALD WATERMAN LEANED back in his seat and wished that it wasn't impolite to yawn.

AUTHENTIC SCIENCE FICTION

Despite the air conditioning, the assembly chamber seemed stuffy, or perhaps it was the psychological effect of listening to too many boring speeches. Even Rayburn seemed subdued, and the visitors in the public gallery, tourists mostly, had nothing to arouse their interest but the spectacle of one senator after another rising to say what he or she had to say about the Calcutta project.

The reporters were frankly bored. In their section, half-filled with the monitoring panels of the newsfax cameras scattered throughout the chamber, they smoked and dozed and furtively played poker. The concentric rows of senators, their aides, secretaries and various officials of the World Council, sat and smoked, or doodled, or leaned back with closed eyes, perhaps deep in concentration or most likely asleep. A few wore headphones, but the majority did not.

Gerald breathed deeply, hoping to kill his desire to yawn by oxygenating his blood, then reached for his headphones, turning the switch to English. The phones remained silent, naturally; there was little point in the interpreters translating the senator's own language. Gerald turned the switch to French, a language with which he was familiar, then relaxed as the smoothly-modulated voice of a female interpreter murmured in his ears.

" . . . I say that this proposal should not be passed without due and serious consideration from each and every member of the Council. I am not one to stand in the path of progress—my record on that score can speak for itself, but I do feel that it would be wrong, criminally wrong, to rush in and grant this fantastic expenditure before every angle and facet of the project has been thoroughly discussed. I can only repeat, as I have done so often, that no nation, or group of nations, no matter how big their hearts and how generous their inclinations can . . ."

Gerald switched off the headphones. Trust Rayburn to hog the last few minutes, even though he was only using his mouth to make empty sounds. The Calcutta project would be adjourned until the next session when it would, if Gerald knew his politics, be passed by an overwhelming majority. Rayburn was only delaying the inevitable.

The assembly broke up and Gerald approached Rayburn to remind him that he was now on leave. The senator, as usual, proved awkward. He stared at his aide as though he had uttered an obscenity.

"Leave? But you can't take leave. Hell, man, don't you realise the work we have to do before the next meeting?"

"It's all taken care of, senator,"

soothed Gerald. "And you did give me permission to visit my father at this time. It was just after we returned from Hainan," he reminded. "Now I've made all the arrangements."

"Then I suppose you'll have to go." Rayburn grumbled, but inwardly he was pleased. Gerald had a habit of being around at the most awkward times, and there were certain things he wanted to attend to. "Don't be too long," he warned. "We've a battle before us and I want to be ready for it."

Gerald nodded and moved away, eager to break off the conversation. Rayburn and his battles! Personally, Gerald was sick of the senator and all his manœuvrings. A blind man could see that Rayburn, at times, was beating his head against a wall with his nationalistic drum-beating. The Calcutta project would go through and nothing Rayburn could do would stop it. His protests merely reflected on the area he represented and made the other diplomats regard him more as a figure of fun than an adversary to be reckoned with.

Gerald, despite his education, was, in some ways, very ignorant of the ways of men. He didn't stop to think, for example, that the more Rayburn was held in contempt by the other senators, the more solid would be his support from his own area. Most men have a weak spot for the

underdog, and the conservative farming element would be all for a man who talked down-to-earth, money-saving politics. Rayburn wasn't concerned with his reputation in the assembly chamber half as much as he was with his reputation among those who had voted him into power.

A cab took the aide to the air terminal, its turbine whining as it edged along in low gear through the central traffic, only gaining real speed when it reached the raised highways. At Teterboro Airport Gerald caught the express jet to Jacksonville, Florida, dozing for most of the two-hour journey. At Jacksonville he had a ninety-minute wait; his chartered jet-copter was due for an engine replacement. To kill time he went for a walk along the coast.

He didn't like what he saw. The sea was calm enough, the rolling, slate-grey waves coming in from the Atlantic and surging against the piles and breakwaters, but the strip along the coast was devoted to the sea farms and the drying of harvested kelp. Men, mostly Blues, worked at the drying racks, turning the redolent seaweed with long-handled forks, baling the dried weed and manhandling it to the pick-up stages.

The stench of drying kelp and rotting fish was heavy on the air. Sea workers, fishermen, long-shoremen and a scattering of

undersea farmers and contract labourers on shore leave thronged the board-walks and jostled obvious strangers. They were a rough, hard bunch. Men who lived dangerously and acted it. Gerald, in his neat clothing, very conscious of his soft hands and soft muscles, was glad to get back to the safety of the airport.

In the restaurant he had a meal, a good one, consisting of various kinds of fish and molluscs, took his time over his coffee and unashamedly listened to a couple of spear-fishers arguing the merits of their equipment. One favoured the old-fashioned pressure gun while the other was all for the new rocket harpoon. From what Gerald could make out neither had much advantage over the other. An attendant signalled to him just as the argument showed signs of developing into a fight.

At the desk he attended to final details.

"Thumbprint this, and this, and this." The clerk held out a series of forms. "Thank you, sir. Are you certain that you don't require a pilot?"

"No pilot," said Gerald. "My licence is in order and I want to handle the machine myself."

"Just as you wish." The clerk's opinion of amateurs was obvious. "If you get into trouble just press the panic button and leave the rest to the machine and to us. In that eventuality you'll have to

pay the cost of the rescue party plus any damage you may have caused."

"Even in the event of mechanical failure?"

"Mechanical failure excepted."

The clerk spoke of that remote possibility as an atheist would refer to the Day of Judgment. "You're fitted with a trace-signal, so radio in if extending time of hire. If you don't we'll come after you." He grinned. "You pay for that, too."

"Maybe it would be cheaper just to buy the machine?" suggested Gerald.

"That, or hire a pilot," agreed the clerk. "No? Well, it's your funeral. Good luck and pleasant flying."

From Jacksonville to the island of Mariguana in the Bahamas took a slow and easy three hours with the jetcopter, set on automatic, doing most of the work. Gerald took over for the last fifty miles, made a slight course correction and arrived just as the sun was sinking below the western horizon. Despite the fading light, he made a perfect landing before a long, low, solidly-built house facing the shore. An attendant, still wearing his daytime clothing of big hat and coveralls, came from an out-house and took charge of the machine. Without speaking to him, Gerald made his way into

the house. A receptionist smiled at him from behind a counter.

"May I be of assistance, sir?" He, like the outside attendant, was a Blue.

"Mr. Waterman," said Gerald. "My father is expecting me."

"Yes, sir." The receptionist gestured towards two heavily-built men who had risen from their seats when Gerald had entered. Despite their tell-tale pallor, they looked tough enough to handle a bull gorilla. They sat down at the receptionist's gesture and took up their magazines. Gerald wasn't surprised to find that even the bouncers were Blues. Everyone resident on the island was a Blue.

"Mr. Gerald Waterman?" The receptionist did things with an intercom.

"That's right."

"Thank you, sir." There were more buzzings and clickings from beneath the counter. "Did you have an enjoyable trip, sir?"

"Not bad." Gerald didn't want to make idle conversation, then realised that this man, like almost everyone else on the island, was cut off from actual contact with the outside and was naturally eager to talk. "Looks as if a storm is gathering about two hundred miles to the west," he said. "But I expect you'll get warning if it heads this way."

"I expect so, sir, we always do." The intercom hummed. "Number

nineteen, Mr. Waterman. Straight down the corridor."

"Thank you, I know the way." Gerald strode down the familiar passage and into a familiar room. His father, looking even younger than he had a year ago, and much younger than when he had taken the treatment, rose from an easy chair and held out his hand.

"Gerald, my boy! Good to see you!"

"And you, father." Gerald dutifully shook hands. "How's grandfather?"

"He's fine. Just fine. Everyone is fine." His father laughed, the laugh of a young, healthy man. "Sit down and chat a while. The others are in conference, something special, but you'll hear all about it tomorrow. New York the same as ever?"

"The same, only more crowded." Gerald glanced around his father's comfortable room, with its books, the fifty-inch telly set, the console model record player, the stacked tapes and tasteful painting, the thick carpets and other evidences of luxury. He sighed, remembering his own room back in Rayburn's old-fashioned house, the strain and rush of normal living and the general rat-race of an overcrowded world. To him, at this moment, his father's room seemed a virtual paradise. He said as much.

"Getting tired, Gerald?" His father reached for a decanter,

poured golden liquid into a glass and poised it beneath a syphon. "Say when."

"When." Gratefully, Gerald accepted the drink and rolled the smooth Scotch around his tongue. "Tired?" He shrugged. "I guess I am a little at that. Sometimes I get the craving just to run away from the whole sorry mess." He finished his drink. "I'll get over it."

"You'll have to." George Waterman took his son's glass and replenished it. "Your time for rest will come, Gerald, but not yet. When it does, you may regret it and long for the old days."

"Not me."

"No? I think you will, but never mind that. Before you can relax you've work to do and things to see to. Still single, of course?"

"Naturally."

"Preston's grand-daughter is looking for a husband. I've suggested to Preston that you two might make a match of it and he agrees. It's about time you started to raise a family, Gerald; it can be dangerous to leave things too late."

"Is she fertile?"

"Her medical says so. You are, I know." George stared thoughtfully at his son. "I think you'd better have two children, a boy and a girl. We want to keep the family as flexible as we can."

Gerald nodded. He wasn't surprised or shocked at his private

life being settled for him by his father and his father's associates. It was one of the things he had grown up to expect, and felt neither enthusiasm nor distaste at the idea. He rather looked on marriage and the raising of children as another man would regard a visit to the dentist. It was necessary, for his own good, and he would be glad when it was over.

"I don't want you to worry too much about this marriage," said George. He seemed to think it his duty to make things quite clear. "It needn't interfere with your normal life in any way, and you'll be free of it, anyway, once you take the treatment." He smiled. "You know, in certain respects this legal death has its advantages. I respect your mother, Gerald, she made an excellent wife, but the prospect of spending eternity in her company is something I would rather not think about."

"Do you ever see her?" Gerald sipped at his drink and wished that his father would change the subject. The old man must think that he didn't know the facts of life.

"Didn't she tell you on your last visit?" George chuckled. "We see each other quite often. We have tea together sometimes and, in fact, we discussed your marriage prospects. One day, after a few decades perhaps, we may even

try living together for a short while." He dismissed his ex-wife as being unimportant. "The thing is, Gerald, I want you to be quite determined about this marriage. I don't want the trouble Hardwick had with his son when the young fool ran off and married a telly star. Luckily, he managed to get the marriage annulled without much difficulty, but it was an unpleasant incident. The boy was almost in the position of having to support a half-dozen irresponsible dependents."

"He could have denied them," pointed out Gerald. "He didn't have to support them."

"He didn't, but what of his children? Would they have defied their mother?" George shook his head. "No, Gerald, you stick to the rules and we'll all be safe. It's for your own good, remember."

Gerald sighed, wishing that his parent didn't think it so necessary to stress the obvious. Of course he would marry carefully with an eye to the future, that was merely self-defence. And of course his selected wife would feel exactly the same as he did about things. They would marry, have their children and each would live their own lives. Love and romance didn't enter into it or, if it did, was kept quite separate from the essential business of rearing an heir.

He rose as the door opened and

another man entered the room. Cyril Waterman was a hundred and twenty-five years old and looked no different than his son George. Or it seemed that way until you saw his eyes. They were old eyes, eyes which had seen much of life and intended to see a great deal more. Gerald, whenever he was with the old man, felt a little like a schoolboy confronted with his headmaster.

"Gerald!" Cyril held out his hand. "Good to see you. Have a nice trip?"

"Not bad." His father, Gerald remembered, hadn't bothered to ask about his journey. Perhaps age brought politeness, or could it be caution?

"I've told him what we've arranged with Preston," said George. "I think two children, Cyril?"

"Which Preston?"

"Why, Quentin, naturally. He's the head of the clan."

"Then why didn't you say so?" Cyril snorted his contempt. "What's the good of calling a man by his surname when there could be four generations of them?" He lost his impatience as he looked at Gerald. "How do you feel about this marriage, Gerald? Or didn't George bother to ask you?"

"I don't mind, Cyril." Gerald didn't think it strange to address his grandfather by his Christian name. "I suppose it's all for the best."

"It is, make no mistake about that." Cyril gestured about the room. "You see all this? You'd like to know that exactly the same comfort awaits you when it's your turn to take the treatment, wouldn't you? Then marry wisely and keep the money inside the family." He clapped Gerald on the shoulder. "And you can't leave it too late. How old are you? Forty?"

"Thirty-seven."

"Time you're due to retire your son will be about the right age." Cyril nodded. "Time enough. No sense in marrying too early and saddling yourself with responsibilities before you have to. Just so as your son is mature and knows his duty when you hand over." He looked at George. "Two children, you said?"

"I think that would be best," said George. "A boy and a girl. You agree?"

"Yes." Cyril changed the subject. "How's Rayburn?"

"Mad."

"Literally, or are you just saying that?"

"Just saying it I suppose, but he seems that way to me at times." Gerald stared past his grandfather's shoulder as the door to the conference room swung open. Several men stood inside, all Blues, most smoking and talking quietly together. Gerald had met most of them before on previous visits to

the island and he knew them all for members of the Mariguana Group.

One of the men didn't fit into the general pattern. His hair was white but it was a natural whiteness, not the bleached colour of an albino. His lined face and bagged eyes gave him the appearance of an intelligent dog. He turned towards the door and Gerald stared at his familiar features. Cyril, noticing the direction of his stare, turned and smiled.

"Prosper," he called. "Come and meet my grandson."

Numbly Gerald shook hands with the head and owner of the Aphrodite Project.

XI

CARMEN WAS ON THE PHONE when Sam returned from duty at the assembly chamber. The small screen did nothing to detract from her beauty and he noticed, with satisfaction, that she had apparently recovered from her grief. She smiled at him, her teeth very white against the redness of her lips.

"Can you help a girl in need of help, Sam?"

"Name it."

"I'm stuck with a survey job, just a check, but I could do it a lot faster if I could use your monitoring room. May I?"

"Where are you now?"

"Downstairs in the vestibule." Her smile grew wider. "I tried to move through the usual channels but got bogged down in red tape. Then I thought of you." She became serious. "If I'm out of line, Sam, just say so."

"Technically you're out of line," said Sam, then winked at her image. "Meet me in the self-serve. I'll be about five minutes."

"I follow." She smiled again, then vanished as she cut the connection. Sam turned to Mike.

"Anything come in yet about that missing girl?"

"Janice?" Mike shook his head. "Not yet. I've sent photostats of her file to the local police and they are keeping a check on unidentified bodies. I put a couple of our own men to check on where she lived, her boyfriend, things like that. So far, no luck. She just seems to have vanished. Maybe she wanted to disappear?"

"Maybe." Sam glanced at his watch. "Anything from Jelks?"

"No, sir."

"Did you get the report from the local police about Augustine?"

"They finally sent in a carbon."

It was Mike's contention that the local police were deliberately unhelpful to the World Police. Sam reserved his judgment. Personally, he had no cause for complaint. He picked up the flimsies, scanned the report and then looked thoughtful.

"So he complained that he'd been robbed. He was breathless as if he'd been running and didn't seem to know just what he was doing." Sam flipped the sheets. It fitted, all of it. If some petty criminal had stolen the parcel that would account for it being missing. But it still didn't account for Augustine's death. Running should not kill a healthy man, and it certainly wouldn't fill his blood with unknown bacteria. He dropped the report; it had told him little he did not already know.

"Do you think that Rayburn could have something on the ball, captain?" Mike had obviously given the matter some thought. "If Augustine was sent for and then slipped a shot of dope, wouldn't that account for it?"

"You've been reading too many thrillers," said Sam. "They sent for a messenger, but they couldn't know which one would answer the summons. And why would they want to kill him, anyway?" He left Mike thinking about it.

Carmen was sitting at a table in the self-serve, looking even more feminine than ever against the sterile plastic of the tables and chairs. She waved at him and Sam walked directly towards her, his uniform getting him past the guard who watched for non-

customers trying to reach the tables.

"Good to see you again, Sam."

"Again?" He glanced at his watch. "Seven minutes."

"I mean in the flesh." She stared at him with disturbing frankness. False modesty, along with many other conventions, had vanished during the past hundred years. Sam spoke before she could pursue the subject obviously on her mind.

"How are your folks?"

"Well enough." She shook her head. "It's funny. I know father died only a short while ago, but it seems as if he's been dead for ages. I suppose I should feel all hurt and tearful, but I don't. Do all people feel this way about death, Sam?"

They didn't, as Sam could have told her. He remembered his own sorrow when his parents had died in a rocket plane crash in the Rockies. But then, all people didn't have the services of a medical hypnotist to dull reality. The medhyp had both removed the memory of his visit and taken the emotional charge from her recent memories. Such therapy was fast becoming standard practice now that death had a new meaning.

To cover his failure to answer her question he produced cigarettes, offered her one and lit them both. Carmen inhaled, let

smoke stream through her nostrils and frowned down at the table.

"Mario's talking of emigrating," she said abruptly.

"Emigrating?" Sam was startled. "Where would he emigrate to?"

"I don't know. He just keeps talking about getting away from it all, stuff like that. Sometimes it gets me worried."

"He must be thinking of taking a job on one of the government developments," said Sam. "The Antarctic mines can always use volunteers. That, or he's just plain forgetful. He must know that no nation now permits emigration unless it's on an exchange basis." He didn't mention that the Antarctic mines were used as a penal colony for law-breaking Blues, or that there was an obvious interpretation of the remark. The only way for Mario to "get away from it all" was by suicide. He reverted to the object of her visit. "So you want to use our monitors, do you?"

"I'd like to, if I could." She remembered her coffee, rapidly growing cold, and drank it before continuing. "It's the Miracle Maid account. They want us to check their flashad programme. You know how we operate. A section of the public is exposed to the advertising and then we check the increased sales in that area."

"Just like that? The increased sales, I mean?"

"Near enough. People always

buy after being subjected to the flashads, and the rise in sales is predictable to within five per cent. The trouble is that the increase in this area wasn't as high as it should have been and Miracle Maid want us to check to see that they haven't been gyped."

"Nice people." Sam was amused. "Don't they trust anyone?"

"In the advertising game you can't trust your own mother," said Carmen seriously. "And I mean that literally. Flashad time on the telly circuits is strictly limited by your people, and the contents of the advertisements are censored. That's why you monitor the telly services. Static installations and mobile projectors are more flexible but they don't reach as wide a section of the public and they aren't as effective. For really predictable results you need the telly screens and tri-dis; most viewers are practically hypnotised by them, anyway." She crushed out her cigarette. "So if you could help me, Sam?"

"As a visitor to the building, it is a part of my job to show you around. Strictly off the record, naturally." He smiled and glanced at his watch. "I'll just tell the office where to find me and then we can get going."

"Thanks, Sam." Carmen was grateful. "But if it means trouble for you, don't bother."

There was no trouble. The monitoring room was staffed with bored and cynical operatives who were only too happy to break their eternal routine of examining slowed-down recordings of telly transmissions. To check them all was impossible unless they increased their staff by a factor of ten, but every broadcast was recorded and spot checks made to see that no one broke the regulations governing flash advertising. Carmen told the file clerk what she wanted, received a spool of film and joined Sam at a viewer.

"Get what you wanted?" Sam had diplomatically stayed in the background while the staff had basked in their visitor's beauty.

"Yes, thanks. The Miracle Maid account ran with the Spot Quiz at that period." Deftly she fitted the spool into the viewer. "This is saving me a lot of time, Sam. The alternative would have been to go to the studios, get pushed around by every clerk in the place and then probably wind up with an edited copy."

"Then why don't the advertisers make their own recordings?" Sam drew a couple of chairs before the screen and rested the control panel on the arm of Carmen's chair. "You know how to operate this?"

"I think so." She checked the controls. "Yes, I can. They're the same on most commercial viewers. Did you ask why the advertisers

didn't make their own recordings?"

"I did."

"Can you guess how many advertisements are put out by each big company every day, Sam? Twenty-four hours a day, don't forget, and thirty channels on the telly circuits alone. Couple that with printed advertisements, whisper-speakers, static and mobile flashads, videophone transmissions and the rest of the merry-go-round and you'll get an idea of the problem. To record and file everything would take a place as big as this." Carmen threw a switch which lit the screen. "Anyway, why duplicate? That's what this place is for."

"Then why come to me?"

"Because I could only get a copy of this recording by filling in goodness knows how many forms and waiting until Doomsday for my turn on the list. And Miracle Maid want the answer now."

"So you used your influence with a certain member of the World Police to by-pass the normal channels and so build up your reputation with your firm as a girl who can get things done. Is that it?"

"That's about it." She turned and smiled at him, her face alluring in the glow from the screen. "Mad at me, Sam?"

"How could I be?" Sam fought the desire to take her in his arms. "Let's get on with the show."

He had seen slowed-down recordings before and had watched the monitors at work, but even so he had to admire Carmen's skilful handling of the controls. She ran the recording at high speed and then slowed it as she came to the part she wanted.

"Recognise it?"

"I think so." Sam stared at the screen. "Isn't this the programme we watched on the day your father died?"

"Yes." Her laugh was a little tremulous. "I haven't bought any Miracle Maid products since then but I guess that I wasn't a very receptive subject at the time." She adjusted the controls. "The ads were scheduled for one every minute, on the minute." The screen flickered and blurred as she increased the speed, then halted with a blaze of colour at exactly the right spot.

"Nice, isn't it?" Carmen made a face at the crude design of the flashad. "Maybe that's why we weren't affected; these things are aimed strictly at morons." More pictures glided over the screen. "Slightly different, but still crude." She sighed as she ran the film to the next advertisement. "You know, Sam, with all the inherent power of this sub-threshold advertising, you'd think that they would be used for something better than just making people buy what they can't afford."

"It comes under freedom of

speech," said Sam. "Once you censor what people say and print and sell, and how they sell it, then you've lost your freedom."

"Meaning that there is no censorship?"

"No, but it's confined to banning things and products which are harmful to the common weal."

"I see." Carmen looked thoughtful. "And just who decides just what is, and is not, harmful?"

"All right." Sam admitted defeat. "So we do have censorship. I'm not defending it, because I can't. To me, any form of dictatorship is indefensible, and no one should have the right to determine what others should, or should not, see, read, buy or experience. But, bad as censorship is, I'd rather have it than the so-called good taste of your advertisers." He gestured towards the screen. "Do you know that a statistician once worked out the fact that popular entertainment was the greatest single cause of the general lowering of intelligence?"

"What axe did he have to grind?" Carmen was cynical. "I'm no statistician, but I'll bet that I could make out just as good a case for blaming the stratoliners for the weather, or for the fashion of wearing brilliant clothing being the cause of myopia. Statistics can prove anything you want them to. Surely, you know that?"

"Maybe, but there are some things you can't get away from. Surely you don't advocate free licence on the flashads?"

"They could be worse," said Carmen. "After all, your censorship is a hit and miss affair, and it's even money that quite a few firms and studios are breaking the code." She busied herself with the controls. "Look, Sam, purely visual."

"What's the idea?" Sam stared with interest at the image of a smiling female. She was superbly shaped and quite nude.

"Psychologists have proved that the unclothed human body, even in this day and age, has a strange fascination," explained Carmen. "This image is to trigger the male response on a subconscious level. Naked woman equals Miracle Maid products, and a consumer will think of one when he is reminded of the other. Male figures do the same for female viewers."

"Pornography." Sam was disgusted. "How low can we get?"

"Quite a bit," she said seriously. "And those figures are artistic, not pornographic. Anyway, didn't the courts once rule that what a person can't consciously see couldn't be indecent?"

"A decision which was reversed after the sex riots fifty years ago," reminded Sam. "That was when they incorporated the flashad code. Viewers may not have been able to

consciously see the images, but they certainly had an effect. Obviously, if they didn't then they wouldn't be used for advertising." He repeated his first comment. "I still say that such advertising is pornographic."

"No more so than using the secondary female sexual attributes to appeal to the eye. The female bust has sold more goods than anything else in history. Read your advertising history if you don't believe me. Why, it was the advertisements which did more than anything else to set the plastic cosmeticians up in business." Carmen triggered the switch again. "There! I thought so!"

"What's wrong?"

"This." The screen flickered and clarified. An advertisement flashed on the screen. It was not the same as the others he had seen. Carmen re-wound the film, raced it through, checked it and said something unladylike. "So that's their game."

"I don't get it." Sam was puzzled. "Why the excitement?"

"Conflicting advertisements. Miracle Maid specified one flash per minute, on the minute. They got exactly what they asked for, but the studios were smart and ran another series in between on the half-minute. The two advertisements cancel out." Carmen fumed. "Damn them! And there's nothing we can do about it."

"Can't you sue?"

"Maybe, but I doubt it. The radio people would have covered themselves in some way." She shrugged. "Well, I've done my part, the rest is up to the lawyers."

"Finished?" Sam wasn't interested in the complexities of the advertising war. He stooped forward to rewind the film, then paused, staring at the screen. This particular image showed the contender on the Spot Quiz, straining and sweating as he struggled to find the answer to the final question. The camera had swung back to show him at full length standing beside the Quiz Master.

Sam didn't stare at the plump and smiling face of the Quiz Master, nor at the strained face of the contender; he stared at what the man carried.

Memory is a peculiar thing. Sam had spoken to Augustine and had commented on his burden. He had glanced at it, no more, but now he recalled the exact time and incident. Parcels, like almost everything else, have their own characteristics. Some are large, some small, some square, some poorly wrapped, the list is endless.

The contender was carrying Augustine's parcel.

XII

THE LOCAL POLICE WERE UN-co-operative. It was, as the precinct lieutenant pointed out, none of their business.

"Sure, we'd like to help you, captain," he said. "But how can we? Where's the crime? Who is making the complaint? Why should we pull in this Joe Leghorn when he's done nothing wrong?" He gestured around the precinct station. "Hell, captain, don't you think we're busy enough as it is?"

It was an understatement. The local police were more than just busy; they were run off their feet. Even as Sam had waited for his interview with the lieutenant three chow-hounds had been brought in, all of them the worse for wear. The food thieves had tried to rob a hydroponic farm on the edge of town, had shot and killed the manager when discovered and had tried to run. Their car had crashed a few blocks away after a running gunfight in which three pedestrians had been injured. The police didn't treat them gently.

On a bench, four people waited to swear out complaints regarding theft. A big man had been charged with mayhem against a Blue; he had beaten up his grandfather-in-law, and sat joking with the sergeant in charge. A group of sullen teenagers had been arrested while on a Blue-baiting, and a corner-prophet waited his turn to be charged with using language calculated to disturb the peace. From a wall speaker the relayed radio instructions to the prowl

cars made a continuous background of noise.

The lieutenant sighed as he listened to the speaker. "Work, work, work," he grumbled. "Nothing but work. You guys in the World Police don't know how lucky you are. How the hell do they expect us to keep order in this town? We couldn't do it with twice the men. I tell you, captain, it's like living in a nightmare. If it wasn't for the officers using their discretion we'd be swamped."

The "discretion" used by the officers was simple. Petty criminals were beaten up with plastic billys and warned to keep their noses clean. Blue-trouble was usually ignored. Who wanted to worry about the legally dead? Petty theft was booked and then forgotten; a man should look after his own property. Most of the law breakers booked in at the station were fined or, if they had no money, put on probation which, in turn, meant a going over in the back room.

The police weren't sadists, but there was simply no alternative. The courts were flooded and the prisons filled to capacity, so short sentences had been discarded in favour of the unofficial and legally unrecognised punishment dealt out by the officers.

Sam realised that he was wasting his time.

"Have you tried Leghorn's address?" The lieutenant was

trying to be helpful. "Asked among his friends, at his office, the people he lives with? Hell, captain, you know the procedure as well as I do."

"I've tried all that," said Sam. "No luck. They clam up when I ask the questions."

"They would." The lieutenant nodded as if he'd expected no different. "Sorry I can't spare any men to dig him out for you, but you see how it is."

"I understand," said Sam. "Thanks, anyway."

"If it was official it would be different," said the lieutenant. "We always like to help." He looked thoughtful. "Tell you what, you might try Father Rosen. He runs a mission down that way, soup and bread for the starving, you know the kind of thing. He might be able to finger this character for you."

"Thanks, I'll try him." Sam walked from the station to a public videophone and called his office. Mike's image flashed on the screen.

"Any luck?"

"No."

"I knew it." The secretary looked disgusted. "These local cops have no time for the World Police. Did they tell you to mind their business while they took care of their own?"

"No." Sam didn't want to discuss it. "Any word on the missing girl yet?"

"Nothing."

"Keep trying," said Sam. "I'm going hunting." Cutting the connection, he left the booth.

On the street he paused for a moment, oblivious of the passing crowds. It was late and the sky was filled with clouds and darkness. A streak of fire from a transcontinental rocket express drew a line of brilliance from horizon to zenith, adding to the flaring glow of the advertisements covering the tall buildings. It was never dark in the centre of the city; night only served to throw the man-made lighting into greater effect.

A jetcopter, its riding lights looking like colourful stars, hooted as it released a cloud of luminous gas. Sam glanced up at the sound, then turned away at the tell-tale flicker of a flashad. He had no desire to be indoctrinated with the compulsion to buy something he didn't want.

Father Rosen was something of a freak in this modern age; he was a man who still had faith. He was old and stooped, and his face had the loose, sagging appearance of a man who should have been fat but wasn't. His cassock was stained and rusty with time and hard usage. His eyes were kind, though shrewd, and his voice betrayed the man of culture.

Sam found him working in a long, mouldering hall half-filled

with a clutter of rough tables and benches. Men and women, many of the women carrying young children, lined up for a bowl of soup and a hunk of bread dished out by an idiotic-looking man wearing an assortment of cast-off clothing, a fringe of straggling beard and a vacuous, lop-sided grin.

"What may I do for you, my son?" The priest came towards his uniformed visitor.

"I would like to talk to you, Father. I need your help."

"Help?" The question hung in the air. "A private matter, my son?"

"Yes. If I could speak with you alone?"

"Of course. A moment while I remind William that, while there are many to feed, there is little to feed them with."

Sam glanced around the mission as the priest whispered to his helper and wondered just what it was that gave a man the strength to work and live among such abject poverty, apparently, of his own free will. Orthodox religion in the Western nations had lost its influence long before Blue had discovered his magic serum and, now that men no longer had to fear hell-fire, had almost vanished from the scheme of things. Even so, a few devoted men and women still carried on the work of Mother Church and

found in the teachings of Christ their own reward.

The priest returned, shaking his head. "A willing helper," he said, "but at times his mind wanders and he forgets what he does. But he has faith, and twice a day he hopes that the miracle of the loaves and the fishes will repeat itself. Perhaps, if he has sufficient faith, it will."

"Perhaps," said Sam. "But isn't it true that God helps those who help themselves?"

"You are a cynic," said the priest mildly. "And yet, in this day and age most men are cynics. Even so, it was promised that the meek should inherit the Earth." He led the way to a small room at the back of the mission. A crucifix hung against one wall, together with a few cheap reproductions of religious paintings. A statue of Our Lady stood on a shelf flanked by candles in ornate holders. A heavy, well-thumbed rosary lay beside a leather-bound missal on a small table. In one corner was a narrow cot. The priest drew chairs from where they stood against the wall, offered one to Sam and seated himself. "And now, my son?"

"I am looking for a man," said Sam, coming directly to the point. "His name is Joe Leghorn, a trouble-shooter living in this area. I understand that you could help me locate him."

"You are a policeman." It was not a question.

"World Police, not local."

"But still an officer of the law. I am a man of God, my son, not of law."

"You quoted the Bible," said Sam. "May I do the same? 'Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's.' But I am not asking you to help me hunt down a man for punishment. I merely want to find him so as to speak with him."

"And your reason?"

"I am trying to protect the common weal. I have reason to believe that Joe Leghorn has something in his possession which could endanger the city. He doesn't know what it is that he has. I want to warn him and eliminate the danger." It was, realised Sam, the truth. His subconscious must have been busy adding two and two and arriving at the inevitable four.

The priest stared thoughtfully at Sam. "You quoted the Bible," he said abruptly. "Have you studied it?"

"I have read it," said Sam. "Not quite the same thing, I'm afraid."

"No," said Father Rosen. "It is not the same thing at all." He fell silent, his eyes thoughtful as they stared at the crucifix, then rose to his feet. "Pardon me for a

moment. I must make sure that William does not become too generous." He left the room and was gone several minutes. When he returned he resumed the conversation as if there had been no interruption. "To have read the Word of God is something rare in these times, my son. I commend your action even though I may not sanction it."

"Because of the danger that each man may make his own interpretation?" Sam knew of the Roman Catholic ban on casual reading of the Bible.

"History has proved that the danger is by no means unreal," reminded the priest. "But enough of theology. You understand, my son, that my position here is a delicate one?"

"I understand."

"Men and women come to me and I give them what I can." The priest sighed. "It is not easy to see so many have so little. But they trust me, and the poor souls gain some comfort by unburdening their hearts. All, you understand, beneath the seal of the Confessional."

"I am not asking you to break that seal, Father."

"I would not if you did," said the priest sternly. "But we digress."

"I think not," said Sam evenly. "You are telling me, in your own way, that you value the trust these people place in you. You feed

them, yes, but you try to do more. You try to spread the Gospel among them as those like you have done for more than two thousand years." He drew a deep breath. "You will not lose that trust because of me, Father. I am not asking you to turn into a police informer or run the risk of being taken for one. But would you believe me if I told you that I consider the finding of Joe Leghorn of greater importance than your work?"

"Nothing can be more important than bringing souls into the House of God," corrected the priest. "But though young, you are shrewd. What makes you think that I can obtain the information you require?"

"Simple. Most of your—parishioners—are Blues. There are a great many Blues in this neighbourhood and they see and hear almost everything that goes on. They have a common bond; those in misery always have a common bond, and they trust and respect you. Their information, because of that, is at your disposal. You have, though you may not know it, a highly efficient intelligence service." Sam corrected himself with a smile. "But, of course, you know it. You are an intelligent man."

"I have been called something other than intelligent at times."

"Because of this?" Sam leaned forward and touched the back of

the other's left hand. It was unmarked. "Why haven't you taken the treatment, Father? Is it the cost? You could easily borrow the money against a five-year labour contract in an undersea farm."

"It is not the cost."

"Then why not take the treatment?"

"Must I live a lie? Can I preach what I preach and yet have so little faith? Life, my son, is but a preparation for the world to come. Did not . . ." He broke off, controlling himself as the half-wit opened the door. He stared furtively at Sam, scuttled towards the priest and whispered in his ear.

"Thank you." Father Rosen pressed the half-wit's arm. "Return to your duties." He stared at Sam. "The man you seek," he said quietly, "is in the shop of a man named Johanasen about six blocks due north from here. You cannot mistake the place. The shop occupies a corner of a warehouse."

"Thank you." Sam looked curiously at the priest. "Why didn't you tell me that you had agreed to help me?"

"Perhaps I had not. It would have been easy for me to have changed my mind. Perhaps many things." Father Rosen hesitated. "You understand that I cannot give you a guide?"

"I can find my own way." Sam rose and then hesitated, staring down at the old man. "Father, does your religion approve of suicide?"

"It does not."

"Would you say that a man who, by exercise of free will, deliberately chose to die rather than to live, would be guilty of suicide?"

"A man has his natural term, my son. To extend it is to go against the Will of God."

"Is it? Then what about all the diabetics who would have died but for insulin? What of the diseased who live now only because of the antibiotics which saved their lives? Did they defy the Will of God?"

"Sophistry," said the priest. "Your arguments are not new to me. I know what you are going to say."

"I am going to say that you have no right to choose death rather than life. Your refusal to take the treatment is tantamount to suicide and directly against the religion you preach."

"You are wrong," Father Rosen was not annoyed. "I believe in the hereafter and the Kingdom of Heaven as revealed to the world by Jesus Christ the Son of God. To believe that, and yet refuse to meet it, is to live a life of hypocrisy." His thin fingers fumbled for the rosary and caressed the worn beads. "Eternal life is not for men, but for Angels."

"Nothing is eternal," reminded Sam. "Not on this world, at least. Men still die and still need the truths you teach. Love, kindness, charity. These are the things we need more now than ever before, but those virtues are rare, and those who teach them few. By refusing to live you are robbing the world of something it cannot do without. Take the treatment, Father. Society and your religion both need you."

The priest did not answer.

"The punishment for suicide is not a pleasant one," said Sam. "At least, so you preach. Do you want to spend eternity in Hell?"

"I may go to Hell," said the priest seriously. "I am mortal, and mortals are weak. But it will not be because of committing suicide. A Papal Bull has made that very clear. Refusal to take the treatment is not an act of suicide and so is not a mortal sin." He smiled and, suddenly, Sam felt very young. "The man you seek may not remain in one place long." The hint was plain.

"I understand." Sam moved towards the door. "Goodnight, Father, and thank you."

"Go in peace, my son."

It was benediction and good-bye. The old priest would cling to his faith and, with his dying, the world would lose a little more tolerance, a little more charity, a little more of the spirit of Christ. Sam, as he walked past the long

line of men and women waiting for their hand-out, felt a sudden depression. To him, at the moment, the mission hall seemed a reasonable facsimile of Hell.

Outside, it was raining, a cold, mist-like drizzle which fogged the air and made the streets shine with unaccustomed cleanliness. Above the city hung a red glow of reflected light so that, even here, there was some reminder of the man-made heaven which money could bring.

Sam walked in the middle of the street, acutely conscious of shadowed doorways and narrow-mouthed alleys. He was not alone; no one was ever truly alone on the streets of the city. Eyes watched him from hidden corners and from the humped shapes of homeless Blues huddled together for mutual warmth, too poor even to be able to afford the dollar for a bed in a communal flop house.

Johanasen's place was, as the priest had said, on a corner, part of a rambling warehouse which looked as if a high wind would reduce it to rubble. A single door opened on the street and was flanked by a window covered to chest height by gummy brown paint. A stout iron mesh guarded the window against accident. It also guarded the window against cleaning, so that the unpainted upper section was almost as

opaque from dirt as the lower part was from paint. A pearly light shining through the grimed glass gave the place a weird, unreal appearance of life.

Sam tried the door, found it locked and kicked on the lower panel. He waited five seconds then tried again, kicking so hard that the door rattled against its frame. Fifteen seconds later he lifted his foot and crashed his heel against the lock. It wasn't a very strong door, but it took a succession of kicks before something yielded with a grate of metal and the door swung open.

"Anyone home?"

Sam stepped from the street into a wide, open space faced opposite the door by a breast-high counter. The light came from a single bulb hanging from a corded flex. The floor was of bare boards. The air was filled with the scent of dust and mildew and, outside the circle of light, shadows clustered as if protesting at his intrusion.

"Can anyone hear me?"

The echoes caught his words, played with them for a little while and then sent them back distorted beyond recognition.

"Joe! Joe Leghorn! Where are you?"

Again the echoes tumbled the words so that they sounded as if the shadows were laughing at some secret knowledge.

Sam frowned and stepped towards the counter, his shoes heavy on the floor. He reached the partition, leaned over it and stared directly down at a crumpled figure in a suit of orange and green.

"Joe!"

Sam jumped the counter and dropped lightly to the other side. He stooped over the limp figure, one hand extended to touch the great artery in the throat, then halted the movement of his arm as he stared towards the edge of the circle of light. Slowly, he straightened and tilted the cone-

shaded bulb so that its brilliance illuminated the rear of the room.

A Blue could die the same as any other man from injury or starvation but, unlike normal men, they did not die of disease or illness. Three men and a woman sprawled in the area behind the counter. They were thin, but not starved. Neither bore any sign of injury that Sam could see, and there was no blood. They were all Blues.

And they were all dead.

To be concluded

FORECAST

A spaceship is tracked from the Moon and later found deserted near a city. Deserted, and with an invitation to the nations of the world to "help themselves." But that was the one thing they daren't do—not until they knew more about it. The crew could tell them—if they could find the crew. **Trojan Horse**, by Robert Presslie, tells how one man tracked down the missing crew with somewhat surprising results.

Dead Weight, by Douglas West, swings into mounting tension as intrigue piles on intrigue with a final solution which throws new light on old prophecies.

Dark Reflection, by A. Bertram Chandler, tells of a young married couple who found truth in a mirror.

Life Sentence, by Philip E. High, deals with the predicament of a man who thought he had the world by the tail, only to find that he had underestimated himself.

Eve No Adam, by Nigel Lloyd, throws a new light on the age-old problem of man versus woman and proves that he who laughs last, laughs longest.

Metamorphosis, by J. S. Huegh, reminds us that, back in the old days, Gods walked the Earth. Gods—or survivors?

Part eight of **The Evolution of Man**, by Kenneth Johns, completes this series which has traced Homo Sapiens from earliest times to the dawn of recorded history.

THEY BLOW UP

by A. BERTRAM CHANDLER

ONCE BITTEN—TWICE SHY. THAT WAS
WHAT KALSHAW BELIEVED AND, FOR HIM
ONCE WAS JUST ONE TIME TOO OFTEN

KALSHAW was one of the lucky ones when the interstellar liner, *Star of India*, blew up. He was in his cabin at the time, in his bunk, and was reading an historical novel borrowed from the ship's library. Most of the other passengers, together with the officers not on duty, were at the dance being held in the Main Lounge—but Kalshaw was not a dancing man, neither was he any great lover of people.

As he lay in his bunk, reading the words of the book as they appeared on the screen of his portable viewer, he could hear the faint strains of music drifting in through the air conditioning system. His lip curled slightly. *Decadent*, he thought. *Decadent. They think of nothing but pleasure. Even between the stars they must bring their tawdry rhythms, their obscene prancings . . .* He devoted his attention once again to his book.

It was interesting—to say the least. The hero and heroine were adrift in a small boat, the boilers

of the liner in which they had been passengers having exploded in mid-Pacific. The hero had already demonstrated his capabilities by manufacturing fishing tackle from a safety pin and a strand of wool unravelled from the heroine's sweater; had, by these efforts, succeeded in warding off the pangs of hunger and thirst. Now, having hoisted a makeshift sail—the materials for which had been drawn from the scanty wardrobes of both the castaways—he was steering for a desert island.

The Twentieth Century, thought Kalshaw. *That was the time to have lived. There was some romance then . . .*

A giant hand slammed him down into his mattress, a violent concussion almost ruptured his ear drums. All the lights went out.

I am blind, he thought confusedly. He stumbled out of his bunk, groped uncertainly around the little cabin. It was all very confusing—something had hap-

P.R. GREEN



pened to upset *Star of India's* rotation around her longitudinal axis; there was no longer any centrifugal force, neither, therefore, was there any longer the comforting illusion of gravity. Kalshaw didn't like free fall. Had he not been so frightened he would have been sick.

At last his fingers found the switch of the emergency light. He was not, he was relieved to discover, blind. Moving clumsily, with a great deal of wasted effort, he climbed into his clothing. He struggled with the door, got it open at last. He pulled himself into the alleyway.

Horried, he stared at the fantastic creature confronting him—the giant bat with the dead-white human face, hanging head downwards, the black, dark shadowed eyes staring into his. Then he remembered that the dance was to have been a fancy dress dance, and remembered, too, that, with the failure of the artificial gravity, there was neither up nor down.

Slowly the bat woman turned over, steadying herself at last by gripping Kalshaw's shoulders with her hands. Now that she was right side up she looked less weird, looked like what she was—an attractive young woman in fancy dress. A badly frightened young woman.

"What happened?" she demanded. "I came to my cabin to

get a handkerchief—then there was an explosion. What happened?"

"I don't know," said Kalshaw.

"We're isolated here," she went on. "There's just this stretch of alleyway, and six cabins. The airtight doors are shut . . ."

"Perhaps we can get them open," he said.

He disengaged her hands from his shoulders, half-scrambled half-floated along the alleyway. She followed him, although with rather more grace than he was exhibiting. They came to the nearest airtight door. It was shut, its inner surface covered with white, gleaming frost. Kalshaw turned, made his way back along the alleyway. The other door was in a similar condition.

"It's just as well," he said, "that you couldn't open those doors. Judging by the frost, there's nothing on the other side of them but interstellar space . . ."

"But that can't be," she said. "The ship must still be intact. The lights are still burning . . ."

"The emergency lights," he corrected her. "As I remember it, each section of the ship has its own batteries." He paused. "Each section of the ship has its own lifeboat . . ."

"I'm not leaving the ship," she said flatly.

"Aren't you?" he asked. "These batteries won't last for ever, you know. And we're losing heat fast.

Furthermore—what about radio-activity? We don't know what caused the explosion, and for all we know every second we stay here increases our chances of getting a lethal dose." He pointed to a short, cross alleyway. "That's where the boat is. We'll go to it; we might, at least, get some sort of information on its radio—it's obvious that the P.A. system is out of kilter."

The boat was roomy enough—after all it was certified as being fit to carry thirty people in conditions of maximum safety without too much discomfort. Kalshaw found the radio, switched it on after he had read the instructions. Almost at once a voice came through the speaker. It was the voice of one of the officers—the slightly sing-song accent with its hissed sibilants made that obvious. It was the voice of a junior officer, a very badly frightened junior officer.

". . . All survivors. Calling all survivors. Make sure that there are no people remaining in your sectors of the ship, then activate the launching mechanism. The boats will stay together. Calling all survivors. Notify me at once of your names and boat numbers. Wait! I will run through the boats in numerical order. Number One, boat Number One . . ." There was a long silence. The voice laughed then, a little hysteri-

cally. "Silly. It's my own boat. Number Two . . . Number Two . . ."

A new voice answered: "Ram Singh, assistant purser, in charge. Seven passengers—Mr. and Mrs. McCallum, Mr. Spirov, Miss Wong, Mr. and Mrs. Angelo and Miss Angelo . . ."

Number Three did not reply, neither did Number Four. Number Five replied, and Number Six.

"Number Seven," said Kalshaw. "No ship's personnel present. Only two passengers—Mr. Kalshaw and Miss . . . Miss . . ."

"Grant," said the girl.

"Miss Grant," finished Kalshaw.

"Are you sure that there are no more in your sector?" asked the officer.

"Yes," said the girl, pushing Kalshaw away from the microphone. "I looked in every cabin."

"Thank you. Number Eight, Number Eight . . . Calling Number Eight . . ."

Kalshaw pulled himself into the pilot's seat, adjusted the straps around his waist and over his thighs. He studied the panel of printed instructions over the control board. He told the girl to get herself into the chair next to his. She did so, having trouble with the stiffly-wired wings of her fancy dress as she seated herself.

Kalshaw poised his thumb over the red button marked *Release*, then made a decisive stabbing gesture. Something coughed gently and the boat shuddered. The

acceleration was very slight, almost unnoticeable.

But the viewports were clear now, were no longer obscured by the walls of the sponson in which the boat had been stowed. Through them shone the stars—the hard, unwinking stars shining against the black emptiness. Vaguely, Kalshaw wondered which of them was Sol, which of them was Antares. It was to Antares III that *Star of India* had been bound. He pushed his vague wonderings to the back of his mind, studied the printed instructions again, located the switch that controlled the lifeboat's gyroscope. He depressed it.

"What are you doing?" demanded the girl.

He did not deign to answer, just watched the stars wheeling slowly across his field of vision, listened to the comforting hum of the machinery that had, miraculously, obeyed his will. *Star of India* swam into sight—or, rather, what was left of her. She was no more than a heap of crumpled debris floating in space. Around her were clustered the boats—six of them. As Kalshaw watched a sponson broke open and another of the tiny craft jetted away from the parent ship.

"Look!" cried the girl unnecessarily, turning in her seat. The fabric of one of her wings brushed Kalshaw's face.

"For the love of God," he

said irritably, "take those damned things off!"

"If you say so, *captain*," she replied sarcastically.

She fumbled with clips and buckles, threw the affair of cloth and wire from her. It landed across the control panel. Kalshaw swore, grabbed at the useless things, crumpling them in his hands. He heard something click. He heard another, deeper note added to the steady hum of the gyroscope. And then the stars were gone, and the broken ship was gone, and through the viewports there was nothing but blackness.

"It was," said Kalshaw, "your fault."

"It was not," said the girl. "Anyhow, let's not waste time arguing about it. What did you do?"

"I did nothing. It was those wings of yours. They fouled the control panel. They pressed the starting button for the Ehrenhaft drive..."

"Which means...?" she asked.

"Which means," he said, "that we ride a line of magnetic force until we land up in the planetary system from which it originates. Then the automatic selector mechanisms—or survival mechanisms—of this boat take over. If there's a planet there capable of supporting human life we land. If not—then I just have to line the boat

up again what I think is the right way and try again."

"You might," she said, "have lined the boat up for Antares in the first place. You might have waited for orders from that officer who seemed to be in charge."

"You might," he replied, "have had the sense not to enter a lifeboat wearing a pair of dummy wings."

"If you hadn't told me to take them off," she said, "this would never have happened."

"Shut up!" he bawled. "Let me think!"

"Not before time," she said acidly. "Still—not to worry. There'll probably be a few months—or years—for you to do your thinking in. Meanwhile, I suppose that the great brain must be fed. I'm going to investigate the commissariat of this boat."

"Go, then," he snarled.

He did not look at her as she unstrapped herself from her seat. He pulled a book—the Manual of Instructions for Lifeboat Crews—from its clips, opened it and started to read. He discovered that the system of air and water regeneration was, as it was in a big ship, entirely automatic. He discovered that the food supply was limited, but that algæ could be nourished on sewage and processed to make human food, and that the necessary algæ to start the cycle were stowed on board, needing only water and nutriment to arouse them from

their suspended animation. He discovered that the boat's rocket drive was chemically powered and that there was fuel sufficient for one landing only. He discovered that the Ehrenhaft Drive was dependent upon the batteries, and that the batteries could be recharged only by the expenditure of rocket fuel.

He discovered that the authors of the Manual were not very optimistic of the chances of the discovery of an already colonised planet by boat crews ignorant of the art of navigation. He learned that Interstellar Law had taken due cognisance of this fact.

She came back into the little control room, carrying two bulbs of coffee. She handed him one.

"I hope you like sugar," she said.

"I don't," he said ungraciously.

"Then let's have your bulb back. I'll empty it and bring you some unsweetened coffee."

"You'll do nothing of the kind," he said sharply. "We haven't an unlimited supply of coffee. We haven't an unlimited supply of anything—except, perhaps, air and water, which we shall be using over and over again. We have to economise . . ."

"All right," she said. "Give me the bulb back, anyhow. It can be reheated next time I have coffee. I'll bring you some fresh."

He watched her go. The bat woman's costume left little to the

imagination, especially now that the concealing wings were gone. Her legs, in their black tights, were long and slim and shapely. The short black tunic emphasised every curve of her body.

It's a pity, he thought, that we just don't like each other.

She returned with the fresh bulb of coffee. He took it from her, put the tube to his mouth and sipped. He felt better, more clear-headed, after the first mouthfuls of the hot fluid.

He told her what he had learned from the Manual. He told her of the legal aspects involved.

"Marry you?" she flared. "Marry you, of all men? I'll tell you something, Mr. Kalshaw. I'll tell you why I was aboard the *Star of India*. Antares III, for me, was just a stopover point. My passage was booked on from there, out towards the Rim, to the frontier worlds. I left Earth because I wanted to find a real man for a husband, not a book-keeper!"

"All right," said Kalshaw. "So I'm a book-keeper. But that doesn't alter the fact that I'm in charge of this lifeboat."

"By what right?" she demanded. "Because you're a man?"

"Yes," he said.

She laughed scornfully.

"You're the only man here—but that's not enough."

And then she was gone.

The living space of the lifeboat was divided into two compartments—that forward incorporating the little control room, that aft the tiny galley. The girl made it plain from the start that the after compartment was her territory, and that Kalshaw was not to trespass in it. She condescended to prepare his meals—such as they were—at set times, telling him that she did this merely that he should have no excuse for invading her territory.

Kalshaw didn't like the arrangement. At times, as he lay on the settee that he was using as a bed, trying to sleep, he considered doing something about it. He allowed himself to wonder if the Grant woman would think any more highly of him if he did—then told himself that any sort of scuffle would be beneath his dignity as a civilized man. On such occasions as he had tried to put his foot down he had been worsted. One such occasion had been a bitter argument concerning the necessity for conserving the stocks of food; the girl had pointed out, with some justice, that the boat, with only two people aboard, was over-provisioned, and that there was no point in their eating converted sewage until they had to.

The days, as measured by the lifeboat's chronometer, dragged by. Kalshaw tried hard to figure out where they were, where they

were going—but as he had not noticed the ship's heading when the Ehrenhaft drive had been switched on, he had no data upon which to base his calculations—neither, he admitted, would his calculations have been of much value in any case. Now and again the girl would make scornful reference to his capabilities as a navigator—and on these occasions he fought hard to subdue the anger rising within him.

He was relieved when he was awakened from an uneasy sleep by the clangour of the alarm bells. He knew what it signified—that the boat had ridden the lines of force to their origin and was now circling a planet. He hastily unstrapped himself from the couch, pulled himself to the viewports. The formless blackness and the swirling lights were gone—in their place was the normal blackness of space and the glittering stars. None of the constellations were familiar. Over to the right was a planet—looking the same size as does Earth from the Moon. Kalshaw strained his eyes but could make out no seas, no land masses. The lifeboat was on the night side of the world.

"Don't waste time staring!" said the girl bitterly. "Find out something about this world, will you?"

He was about to ask her how, when he noticed that the little red light over the Information

Panel was blinking steadily. He turned the switch to *Oral*.

"We are in a closed orbit around the world you see below you," said a metallic voice. "It's mass is point nine two of that of Earth. Night temperature on the Equator twenty degrees Centigrade, at the Poles minus thirty degrees Centigrade."

The voice stopped abruptly.

"What about air, water?" asked Kalshaw. "What about animal life?"

"Don't be a fool," said the girl. "You can't talk to a machine."

"A spectroscopic examination," went on the voice, "will be made as soon as we are on the sunlit side of this world. Meanwhile, I must report that there is no evidence whatsoever of artificial illumination."

A crescent of blinding fire grew along the rim of the dark of the world. Dark filters snickered softly as they slid into place over the view ports. The crescent of fire contracted upon itself, became a great ball of light.

"A Sol-type primary," said the mechanical voice. "Spectroscopic analysis of the atmosphere now under way . . . Atmosphere rich in oxygen but suitable for human life forms . . . No evidence of waste products, either of chemical combustion or of atomic energy . . . All relevant details of analysis are recorded on my tapes . . . Surface of planet 75 per cent.

land, 25 per cent. water . . . Rich vegetation . . . Probability of animal life, but no sign of intelligence . . . Equatorial temperature thirty-one degrees Centigrade . . . Temperate Zones, in summer hemisphere, twenty-five degrees Centigrade . . .”

“It looks a good enough planet,” said Kalshaw.

“You can’t see from here,” replied the girl.

“We have to decide,” Kalshaw told her.

“I have decided. I’ve decided that I want no part of a primitive planet with a man who’d be more at home in the suburbs of any big Earth city. We’ll go on—and hope that the next planet we find is more suitable.”

“The search might take years,” said Kalshaw. “And I’ve no intention to spend years in this tin coffin with *you!*”

He pulled himself to the control board, stretched out his hand to the big switch labelled *Automatic Landing*. She caught his arm, tried to pull him away from the controls. He pushed her away savagely. And then they were fighting, the pent up fury engendered by their days together finding its outlet. Her nails tore his face as they reached for his eyes, her knee caught him in the groin. And that was the last that he remembered until the initial braking blasts wakened him from his madness. The ship

was coming in for a landing when he relaxed his efforts to restore consciousness to her, deeply relieved to know that she was not dead after all, that he had not quite strangled her to death.

The electronic brain of the lifeboat had a certain intelligence; it had been designed to take full and complete charge in the all-too-likely event of the boat’s being filled with a crew of the most hopeless groundlubbers ever to take passage from Earth. In its own quiet way it weighed, evaluated. Nobody had answered its questions regarding the most suitable climate in which to land—the two humans were, at the time, in neither the mood nor the condition to answer polite questions—so it had assumed—insofar as it could assume anything—that one half of the survivors must be Esquimaux and the other half Liberians. Obviously, it could not please both parties—but it could, and did, select a climate in which both hypothetical parties could survive without too great discomfort.

Unluckily, the Temperate Zone was singularly deficient in suitable landing places for a rocket plane—for that is what the boat had become on entering the atmosphere—screaming in at almost supersonic speed. Had the electronic brain been human it would have sighed with relief when its keen

senses informed it of the long, straight lake gleaming in a sheltered valley among the mountains.

Kalshaw looked up from the almost inert body of the girl when the lifeboat hit the water. He saw the white sheets of spray obscuring the viewports. He staggered to his feet, looked out through the nearest port. As the boat slowed the huge bow wave subsided. He saw a white beach sliding past, and rocks, and, in the background, a dense forest of tall, odd-looking trees.

The metallic voice was speaking again.

"The landing has been made. You are now once again in full control of the boat. Enough fuel remains for limited travel on the surface of the water. There is not enough for further flight."

The girl was sitting up now, fingering her bruised throat. She did not look at Kalshaw.

"Well, what now?" she muttered.

"I'm going to ground the boat," said the man. "There's a nice shelving beach ahead and to the right."

"All right. Do it. Don't yap about it."

Kalshaw ignored her. He had studied the controls during their long flight along the lines of magnetic force. He knew what to do—but was wondering if the rocket drive would function with the main venturi under water.

There was only one way to find out.

The drive functioned quite well. It drove the lifeboat with considerable velocity onto a barely submerged pinnacle rock that ripped her bottom out. She sank in deep water at least three hundred yards from the beach. Burdened as he was with the semi-conscious girl, it was all Kalshaw could do to swim that three hundred yards.

She recovered before he did.

She stood there, tall and straight in the late afternoon sunlight, looking down at him, her hands on her hips. She was still wearing the short black tunic of her bat woman's costume—the tights had long since been discarded.

"Well, my bright suburbanite," she sneered, "what do we do now? Are you taking me to the corner cafe for dinner? Or do you feel like catching a 'copter for the West End and the bright lights?"

"Lights..." he repeated stupidly. Then: "We'd better make a fire..."

"Why?"

"Because..." he began lamely.

"Because castaways *always* make a fire," she finished for him. "Because it's the conventional thing to do. Go on—rub two pieces of dry stick together. This I shall enjoy watching."

He glowered.

She fumbled in a pocket at the

waist of her tunic, brought out a little metallic object.

"It's lucky," she said, "that I've always preferred the old-fashioned type of cigarette. It's lucky that I always carry a lighter . . ." She tossed the lighter from hand to hand. "Here's our fire—when we need it. Come on, now, get up. We have to explore before dark. We have to find if there's a cave or any other sort of natural shelter we can take over. There must be animals on this world as well as plants—and some of them might be dangerous."

He got slowly to his feet. She stood well back, made no attempt to help him. Before he was fully erect she started striding off down the beach. He broke into a staggering run, pushed past her, took the lead.

He did not bother to look back to see if she was following. He didn't care whether she did or not. As he walked he felt warmer, could feel some of the strength flowing back into his body—but he knew that the unfamiliar pull of gravity would soon tire him. The white sand beneath his feet was trackless. On his right hand was the forest—and beyond that, he knew, were the snow-covered peaks he had glimpsed from the control room of the lifeboat shortly after the landing. There would be time, he thought, to worry about those peaks later—if at all.

The vegetation inshore was not so strange as he had thought at first glance. There were thorny bushes, some of which bore scarlet flowers and some of which sagged under the weight of clusters of white, waxen-looking berries. The trees had straight, leafless trunks for fifty feet or so, then burst into an almost globular mop of foliage. Furtive rustlings came from behind the bushes, and an occasional chattering sound.

Kalshaw paused as he noticed a shrub of a different type from the others. Starlike, half a dozen straight branches radiated from a common centre, about as thick as a man's wrist at their base. The man laid both hands on one of them, wrenched and twisted. It was springy, but not too much so. At last he broke it free. He hefted it in his hand. It made a comforting club.

"What about one for me?" she asked.

"Help yourself," he replied. "They're free."

He strode on, conscious that she was wrestling with another of the branches. At last he heard her feet scuffling over the dry sand as she chased after him. He turned back briefly, was grimly amused to see that her strength had not been sufficient to win a club for herself.

Ahead of him a high outcropping of rock ran down to the water's edge. There was a cave there, he

saw—a black gap in the grey rock face almost as tall as a man. He paused before it—then, hefting his club in his right hand, took a step forward.

She caught his arm.

"Don't be a bigger fool than you have been already. You can't go in there without a light."

He shook her off.

"I'm not afraid of the dark, even if you are."

"Don't be childish!" she almost screamed. She picked up a light, frayed piece of what looked like driftwood. The tiny flame of her lighter was almost invisible in the sunlight. The end of the driftwood smouldered sullenly, then flared into flame. He took the torch from her, then strode into the cave. She followed.

It was the eyes of the beast that they saw first—two evil, yellow sparks gleaming out of the thick darkness. Then they heard it snarl, heard the dried vegetation that it had gathered for its bed rustle as it poised itself to leap.

Kalshaw had no time to think, no time to feel afraid. The thing was on him in a flash, knocking both club and torch from his hands. The animal's legs were around him and sharp talons were lacerating his back. The hot breath of it was in his face and he could hear the gnashing of the teeth that sought his throat.

His hands closed round its

scaly neck, squeezed and pushed away, but the thing was strong. He felt himself weakening, knew that he could not hold it off much longer.

Something caught him a numbing blow on the shoulder. Something whistled past his right ear, and he heard the thud of the blow as it struck the reptilian beast. Other blows followed, only a few of which hit him. Suddenly he was aware that the throat between his hands was no longer pulsing.

"You can stop," he croaked. "It's dead."

Her face, pale but calm, appeared in the circle of radiance thrown by her lighter. She knelt—but not, as he thought at first, to examine his wounds. She was inspecting the carcass of the late occupant of the cave.

"An ugly brute," she said. "Like a six-legged, soft-skinned crocodile . . . Drag it out, will you, and pull the legs off. You should be able to manage that—we've no tools for any butchery, anyhow. We'll roast the legs."

"My back," said Kalshaw. "You'd better look at it. This brute dug its claws into it."

She bent over him.

"H'm. There are a few scratches. You'd better come outside."

He got unsteadily to his feet. When it seemed that he might lean upon her, she stepped smartly to one side. He staggered out of

the cave, supporting himself by his hand on the rough wall. He stripped off his torn, blood-stained shirt, stood there in the last of the sunlight while she examined his back.

"Men," she said. "Not *real* men, but men like you! The fuss they make over trifles!"

"These scratches—as you call them—might turn septic," he pointed out.

"That'll be just too bad," she said. "Thanks to your having lost the lifeboat we have no antibiotics . . . Get down on your belly by the edge of the water—I'll wash your back for you. But that's all that I can do."

Her hands were contemptuous, ungentle—but his back, after she had finished washing it, felt clean. Then, at her suggestion, he went back into the cave and dragged out the body of the animal. With a sharp-edged stone that he found he succeeded in severing all six legs from the body. The rest of the carcass he got rid of by wading out with it some distance into the lake—there was enough current to carry it away.

"What did you do that for?" she demanded.

"The thing might have a mate—or something else big and hungry might be attracted by the smell of the blood."

"We shall be hungry ourselves tomorrow," she pointed out.

"Better to be hungry than to be eaten," he snarled.

He watched her as she coaxed the fire that she had built into life. He admired the skill with which she constructed a rough spit from suitably shaped pieces of stick, lashing the legs of the monster to it with pieces of strong, tough vine that she had found in the shrubbery.

The meat, as it roasted, smelled good. The upper joint of the legs was plump and juicy. The flesh was not unlike chicken. Kalshaw and the girl ate two of the legs apiece with relish. The other two they saved for the following day.

She said abruptly: "I'm turning in now. You stay outside and keep the fire going."

"It's better company than you," he said.

When she had gone he looked up at the unfamiliar constellations—it was now long past sunset and the last of the afterglow had almost faded in the west. He looked up to the stars in their strange groupings and tried to identify Sol. He could not. He sat by the fire and stared into the glowing coals. He smiled bitterly. He had read so many stories of shipwreck, so many stories of people being cast away on uninhabited islands and planets—but none of them had been at all like this.

Inside the cave she screamed. He acted fast, but with delibera-

tion. He picked up a long dry stick, thrust it into the fire, waited until it was well ablaze. Only then did he run into the cave.

She was cowering, huddled up, in the corner.

"A mouse," she said. "It . . . ran over me . . ."

He kicked the pile of dried fronds on which she had been sleeping. Something ran out—it wasn't a mouse, but it was small, and furry and, if one discounted the six legs, not too dissimilar to a mouse. Moving with a speed that surprised himself, he stooped and struck out with his free hand. His fingers closed on the little, squirming body. He walked to the outside of the cave. Carefully he released the little creature.

"Off you go," he whispered.

"Mr. Kalshaw!" she was calling. "Bill! You aren't going to leave me alone, are you?"

"No," he replied.

Slowly, with a great flaring and thunder of her exhausts, the survey ship settled. She did not land on the lake, but on a little rough plateau not far from the cave, a landing place that would have been impossible to any ship making an aircraft-type landing. As she touched down her tripodal landing gear adjusted itself to the rough terrain, one of the great vanes automatically shortening itself, one of the others lengthening. The fires started by her jets

died as floods of carbon dioxide poured from her venturi.

High on her side opened an airlock door, and as it opened the rungs of a ladder extruded themselves from her sleek plating. Slowly, carefully, three men clambered down the ladder, stood staring about them.

"Look!" one of them cried, pointing. "I said that the fire we saw was evidence of intelligent life!"

"And humanoid life, too," said one of the others.

"Humanoid be damned," said the third. "Those are humans!"

The man and the woman walking along the beach wore their rags proudly. Each was armed, each was carrying a rifle as though it were a normal accessory to dress, although on the man's back was slung a long, powerful-looking bow.

The elder of the three men from the ship—he wore the four gold bands of captaincy on his sleeve—stepped forward, saluted gravely.

"Permission to land, sir?"

"Of course, captain."

"We had no idea that this planet was colonised—but, of course, communications out towards the Rim aren't what they might be . . ." He smiled. "I suppose you are colonists?"

The man and the woman spoke at once—one saying *No* and the other *Yes*.

"You mean that?" asked the man. "Do you mean that, Elspeth?"

"Well—aren't we colonists?" she asked.

"If you aren't colonists," asked the captain, "than what are you?"

"We *were*," said the woman, "survivors from *Star of India*."

"You must have come in a lifeboat," said one of the men from the survey ship.

"We did," said Kelshaw. "It's in the lake, with its bottom ripped out . . ."

"Bill made a raft," said the woman, "and we used it to dive from. Once we got out one of the spacesuits, which we used as a

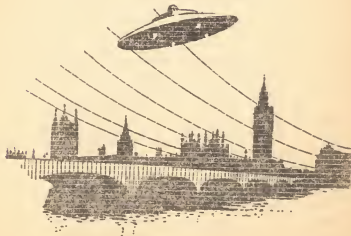
diving suit, we were able to salvage enough in the way of weapons and equipment to make life safer and easier."

The captain smiled.

"Life will be safe enough and easy enough for you both from now on. I extend to you the hospitality of my ship—and, as soon as the survey of this planet is completed, we blast off for Earth."

Kalshaw looked at his wife, and she looked at him. They linked arms as they faced the men from the ship.

"No, captain," said Kalshaw firmly. "You can't get us aboard one of those things, not ever again. They blow up."



SALUTE YOUR SUPERIORS!

by JOHN KIPPAX

*IT WAS SUCH A PITY THAT THE VISITOR WAS
WEAK ON PROCEDURE. IT WAS EVEN MORE
OF A PITY THAT HE MET THE ONE MAN WHO
COULDN'T TOLERATE INSUBORDINATION*

FELL, the chief medical officer, flicked the pages of the thick mass of typescript and sighed.

"'Space is Mine' by Leonard G. Wrokel. I've seen some self-deception in my time, Chaldier, but this beats everything."

"And he wants a publisher," said Chaldier. His lean height and dark features contrasted strongly with the grey tubbiness of his chief.

"Yes." Fell glanced at the clock and then at the brown and purple of the moors which showed through the broad window. "He'll be out for his walk now."

Chaldier walked to the window.

"And he'll expect an answer at

once, of course. What a sad case he is. So brilliant, and still in possession of what they call 'all his faculties.' When he walks through the village the children run to him. They don't suspect what he is. They must think that he's some sort of official here. That sort of thing feeds his dream, of course."

"As we have to."

"Yes. Here, Wrokel is still king."

"The only chance we can see of a cure," said Fell.

Chaldier said: "I spoke to the new attendant. Explained how he must always play up to Wrokel."

"Good." Fell pulled a news-

paper cutting from a folder. He showed it to Chaldier, who crossed and read.

"Starman Wrokel. First on Mercury.' That was his last exploit?"

"Right. And soon after he became the hallucinate he is today." He replaced the cutting. "What sadness we deal in. The public have forgotten—they always do." He lit a cigarette and gave one to Chaldier, then turned his attention to the typescript again. "He might get a publisher for his book. Autobiographical novel. Some of the stuff in here, you'd swear it happened. He describes these Martians——"

"Which don't exist——"

"With all possible realism and detail."

"They are real, to him."

Fell said: "You must read this. These Venusians he creates, the swamps. Then there's all the fantastic battle stuff . . . He was a fine spaceman, we know that. What a pity that we've never yet come across a scrap of humanoid life outside Terra. There ought to be more support for graphic stuff like this."

"Yes. In his mind that poor fellow goes far beyond Sol's little planets. He wanted battles, and meetings with distant peoples, and he never got them, until he came to Andermoor. Here he has what he wanted, and the

obedience of all those under him."

"Right down to the two gardeners. There's a piece here——" Fell turned the pages, "——where some alien disobeys him, and he *thinks* him away—just like that. Fantastic. Wrokel can really write, and there's an eerie quality about some of the passages. This alien bit again. You'd swear it happened. Judging by the description, I'd say that he chose you for a model."

"I'm complimented. You know," said Chaldier, "they say that when a man loses his sight he can get positive compensative abilities, extension of what he can already do. What does a man get when he loses his mind?"

"There's an expression for a medico to use."

"I was speaking colloquially."

"And inaccurately. You mean that perhaps Wrokel now has an extra something?"

"We know how big and strong his world is. Any time now it should be strong enough for him to invite us, his friends, inside it. Then, perhaps, we can begin a cure."

Fell posed a quiet question: "And *if* we should cure him?" He shook his head. "Perhaps somehow he knows that now, this is the only place where he will have any power—the power he thinks he wields, which is effectively the same thing as real power." He

gestured at the typescript on the desk.

"Did you feel that he has been compensated for the loss of what we call reason?"

"Difficult to say. His delusion is so complete, as though he were in another . . ."

"—World? How about the parallel worlds theory? Or even the parallel universe?" Chaldier asked the question quietly.

"A universe where there are humanoid Martians, and battles? Long odds against. But, that book—" He shook his head. "What an imagination. All things obey him. And those that don't—" He lingered over the last word, then shut the book with a snap. "I need some fresh air. Shall we stroll?"

They left the room, passed along the corridor and down the stairs, and out into the autumn sunshine. They descended the steps which led through the lawns and ornamental gardens to the gate, past which ran a moorland road which continued until it reached Elsom's farm. Then it petered out into a rough track.

They finished their cigarettes in silence as they dawdled, occupied with sad thoughts of fallen greatness.

Fell said slowly: "There *is* always the possibility of having

visitors from other planets, I suppose."

"Always," answered Chaldier. He laughed gently. "You still thinking of poor Wrokel's book?"

"Yes. It was unsettling. But I admit that I found myself speculating professionally. What will they be like?" He shrugged away the thought and remarked: "Next year I'll see Morrison sets those salvias closer together."

"Look," said Chaldier.

Wrokel was coming through the gate. He was a tall man, over six feet, and he carried himself as though permanently on parade. Dark and hawklike, his appearance was such as to command respect anywhere—even in a mental home. As he approached, Chaldier and Fell drew themselves up and saluted with gravity. Wrokel returned the salute, at the same time favouring them with a piercing glance as though ready to find fault with their turnout.

"At ease gentlemen."

They obeyed.

"Have you enjoyed your walk, commander?" asked Chaldier.

"You went over the moor this time," remarked Fell.

"For a little longer than usual," added Chaldier.

"I have not enjoyed my walk this morning." Wrokel seemed worried. "Insubordination is a thing which always grieves me, for it shows that at bottom the man

guilty of it is a poor, ill-adjusted creature. And an object of pity, don't you think?"

Fell and Chaldier exchanged glances. They were positive that Wrokel was harmless, what with his respect for human life and the mild treatments he had been given at Andermoor. And Wrokel had cathartically put all his danger into that crashing book which lay on Fell's desk.

"Agreed, commander. To whom are you referring?"

Wrokel surveyed the garden with an air of seeming disdain.

"Just now. I saw him on the moor. But what can you expect from these pilots of the auxiliary service? They simply have not the same discipline as the regulars."

Chaldier asked, carefully: "You were stern with him?"

"I had no alternative."

"What exactly happened, commander?" asked Fell.

"I was walking on the moor when I saw this craft settling down into the heather. I took it at once for one of the new circular craft which they are issuing to the auxiliary forces. I mentioned them in my book, you may remember. Its power tubes were causing——"

"Hoi!" It was a call from the gate. Elsom, the farmer, a florid man of forty-five, came hurrying in. He carried in his hand a strange object which, on closer inspection, proved to be the leg

of a sheep. The haunch was carboned and dripping, while the wool upon it was closely singed. Elsom knew Wrokel by sight. He nodded in an offhand way and brandished the leg at Chaldier and Fell.

"What do you make of that?"

They were used to the man's blunt ways—they liked him. As they inspected the leg, Elsom continued.

"Saw a couple of hawks flying round so I want up to see. Thought for a bit that a party of tramps had been having a feast. There's six big round patches, all burned, up there, just as though somebody had lit six bonfires. And with all this rain we've been having, too. But—— This is no tramp's cooking. This sheep's been burned up all sudden."

Wrokel intervened easily.

"Yes," he said, "the insubordination I was telling you about. This pilot who landed refused to obey me. And he tried to bribe—to make me accept a present, too. Ridiculous—a regular pilot would never——"

"What present was that, commander?" asked Chaldier.

"This moving metal and wire thing——"

"Where is it?" asked Fell.

"A mere bauble. I threw it in the stream. I was so displeased that——"

Wrokel stopped and shrugged,

considering the distasteful incident as closed, apparently. The other three glanced at each other and then back to Wrokel.

"We find this very interesting, commander," said Fell carefully. "Will you show us, please?"

"If you wish. It will not take very long. About ten minutes past the farm." Wrokel led off with his long stride, out of the gates and up the farm road. Elsom, having got rid of his horrid relic, walked with them.

As Wrokel strode ahead, Fell was talking cautiously.

"This is queer. We have no circular craft in general use, and nothing you can call the 'auxiliary.' And this burning——"

"Like the remains of half a dozen bonfires," said the farmer.

"And what's the bauble he spoke of?" asked Chaldier.

Elsom waved to his wife as they passed the farmhouse, and they continued upwards to where the moor levelled out to a wide gorse and heather-covered plateau, the home of birds and a few ponies and sheep. Plover wheeled and called from the bright sky, and the ground, here consisting of hummocky grass for the surface, squelched with the recent rain and gave under their feet. After five minutes Wrokel, still ahead by twenty yards turned off the sketchy path to where a mountain

stream ran into a pool. He followed the stream for some little distance, at one point indicating something in the stream bed with a careless, jabbing motion of his hand. When they reached the spot he had pointed out they stopped and Chaldier went down to the edge of the water.

"You keep up with him," he said. "I'll look for that present, whatever it is."

Fell and Elsom hurried after Wrokel. The tall man had stopped, about a hundred and fifty yards further on. When they reached him they found that he had stopped at the edge of an area of rough grass where the drainage was particularly poor, and where some sheep grazed, avoiding the set of charred patches about thirty yards from where they stood.

"Here you see where the auxiliary landed, without my permission, of course." Wrokel pointed out the patches. "His exhaust and propulsion marks are quite distinct."

Fell and Elsom examined the places. It would have needed a circle of a hundred and twenty feet in diameter to have covered them all—six black areas each about six feet across. The charred earth had been dried hard, and only now was moisture from the surrounding ground beginning to creep in.

Fell asked: "This where you found the sheep leg?"

"Yes. Look—there are one or two other bits."

Fell stood in the circle and asked: "Bonfires?"

Wrokel stood looking up at the birds.

"Don't see how," said Elsom.

"Neither do I."

"He said——?"

"One of the auxiliaries. Impossible."

They looked over at Wrokel—he gave a high call, plaintive and penetrating, and a plover settled near his feet and walked with bobbing steps towards him. He bent to caress it.

"I never heard of a tame plover, either," said Elsom, staring.

The plover was feeding from Wrokel's hand. He loves all things if they obey him, thought Fell. They moved back to Wrokel. The plover flapped away.

"I reprimanded the fellow, and still he was disobedient. I *will* be saluted in the proper manner."

Fell spoke with caution. "Please, show us exactly how and where."

"You see where he landed? That's very clear. I was watching from the left, and to the back of us, here." They could see his foot-marks on the soggy ground not far from the stream, when he took them to the place.

"His ship descended vertically, of course, on six power plumes——"

"—Power plumes——" breathed the doctor.

"—And he came out to meet me."

"A man?"

"Broadly speaking—a man."

Fear showed on Elsom's face.

"He bore this gift, this toy, in his hand. Perhaps he thought that it was some sort of bribe for me, he having landed without my permission; slack on discipline the auxiliary, you know. He handed me this toy, and then he *bowed*! Ridiculous fellow. Look here, you can see our tracks. This is where he came to and stood, facing me."

They saw. The tracks coming from the direction of the six burnt patches were of a very broad, human-like foot.

"He did not *salute*," Wrokel's voice raised a couple of tones. "Then he turned to go back to his craft."

There was a hail from Chaldier, but they barely heeded it, for they saw that the retreating tracks went a dozen yards and stopped. Vanished. Elsom jerked his head at Wrokel, and murmured: "Is he safe?"

"We've always thought so."

"Until now?"

Chaldier arrived, panting. He held in his hand a curious object. It was like a ball-shaped mesh of wires, about eighteen inches in diameter. Some of the wires were

gold in colour, others silver, and a third kind shone iridescent blue. Each, though thin enough to be called a wire, yet possessed a translucent quality. From its small base trailed a coupler of strange pattern.

"This . . ." said Chaldier, ". . . was the *toy* he threw away."

Fell took it carefully in his hands—a glance at Wrokel showed that he was watching the sky again, aloof, in his own world.

"Assuming that each of these wire things represents a track," said Fell quietly, "this can only be a model of an atom—a very detailed model." He fingered the coupler. "With the right sort of power unit, it could have been a *working* model." He glanced at the other two. "Come on."

They came to Wrokel. Fell spoke carefully, his mind trembling on a brink of great depths, and—terror.

"The auxiliary gave you this, commander?"

"Yes. There was a small thing attached to the bottom. Little lights moved at various speeds along those wires. The man did not salute."

"And you," asked Fell. "What did you do?"

"I sent him back to his own planet."

Chaldier gasped.

"To his own planet?"

"Of course. You have read about them in my book, have you not? He was fairly typical of the Arcturus IV people."

"So you sent him back in his ship to his own planet," breathed Fell. Elsom was standing with his mouth open, plain fear on his honest face.

"No. Not in his own ship. As far as I remember, I banished him with my usual——" He stopped and knitted his brows. "But you have read of it in my book, h'm? Now I would like to return to HQ." He drew himself up, ready to return their salutes. He was saluted. Then he left. "Goodbye, gentlemen," he said.

Fell's voice was trembling and bitter.

"Perhaps we deserve it! A visitor from a tremendously advanced technology comes bearing a gift that might well be priceless—a model of an atom, accurate and complete I've no doubt. And they pick on him to give it to!"

Chaldier said slowly: "And apart from it looking as though Wrokel can do what he says he can—what might that civilisation do to us, for treating their emissary like that?"

"Perhaps," said Fell, grimly, "we'd better find a publisher for that book."

BOOKS

MARTIN MAGNUS ON MARS
by William F. Temple. Frederick Muller Ltd., 9s. 6d., 190 pages.

Those who have read the previous books of this series, *Martin Magnus, Planet Rover* and *Martin Magnus On Venus* will need no introduction to this likeable character. This book, while complete in itself, continues his adventures and ties all the threads in the series into a neat bundle.

The action starts on Venus where Martin and his friend, Cliff Page, are wrecked by a Venusian. They have followed the signal of a radio beacon and realise, when it is too late, that they have been following the wrong signal. The Venusians, strange water-creatures with tremendous strength and high intelligence are just about to put an end to the pair when rescue arrives in the shape of a new model ion rocket.

From Venus Martin goes to Mars, there to investigate the mystery of a strange "pill-box" which has been discovered, and which no one seems able to open.

He, more by luck than judgment, manages to gain an entry into the structure and discovers that it is a space craft left by an unknown race an unimaginable time ago. It takes them back to Venus, to the spot near the radio beacon which was the cause of their original crash and, once again, they are faced with the inimical Venusians.

This is an outright juvenile with accent on action, adventure and fast movement, and I enjoyed it because of that. The science is good and the author knows how to write to hold the interest of his readers, whether they be young or young in heart.

THE COMING OF THE SPACE-SHIPS by Gavin Gibbons. Neville Spearman Ltd., 13s. 6d., 188 pages. Illustrated with drawings and photographs.

In any argument there must be two sides, and this is the case whenever unidentified flying objects—Flying Saucers—is the point of discussion. That there have

been unidentified objects spotted in our skies is beyond argument. That they are spaceships manned with little green men from Venus; tall, proud men and women from Mars, or any of the other fauna stated, emphatically, to be within such vessels is open to doubt.

The author, however, has no doubts at all. The first chapter of his books is level-headed enough and deals with U.F.O's in general, and offers evidence for their existence. The next promptly leaves factual data and goes off into what can only be described as mysticism or the revelations of a modern-age prophet.

Not only, according to the author, are the U.F.O's spaceships, but they are manned by beneficent, God-like Beings from space. Humanoid, naturally, and with the self-appointed task of watching over us so as to prevent us from hurting ourselves.

The sole evidence for this is based on the fact that, as far as we know, no harm has been offered to any living human being by any Flying Saucer. While admitting a doubt as to just where the Saucers originate, the author offers the choice of Venus, Mars, Saturn or the Asteroids. He also offers three theories to account for their existence.

They, their crews that is, could have evolved long before the Earth had solidified. They could be survivors from Lemuria. They could be survivors from Atlantis. The evidence for either of these theories is purely negative.

A real contribution to the field

lies in the names given by the author to differentiate between various types of U.F.O's. They, apparently, fall into four categories: vast metallic discs, cigar-shaped craft, scout craft and unmanned scanners. The names, derived in part from Sanskrit, for these categories are: Type one, Vulya; Type two, Vunu; Type three, Vimana; Type four, Vidya. Armed with this terminology, Flying Saucer enthusiasts can now talk their own jargon.

The rest of the book deals with the author's own sightings—nine of them—and his personal conviction that not only are the Flying Saucers spaceships manned with God-like beings, but that they are busy surveying the terrain for a landing place from which to announce their existence to the world. The landing place under scrutiny is the area around Stafford; the time of landing is unstated.

Those who firmly believe, as the author firmly believes, in the existence of Flying Saucers, will welcome this book. Those who, like myself, would like a few more questions answered before they can become converted, will feel irritation at the total disregard of logic in arriving at the final conclusion. The old objection that it is impossible to know how high and fast a thing is travelling until the size is known still holds water. And it is asking a little too much to accept the existence of these beneficent beings on the unsupported opinion of one man, no matter how sincere he might be.



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MEN, MICROSCOPES AND LIVING THINGS by Katherine B. Shippen. Illustrated by Anthony Ravielli. Phoenix House Ltd., 12s. 6d., 155 pages.

This is a book designed for the younger reader but which I thoroughly enjoyed. As an introduction to biology it is ideal and the illustrations do nothing but help the reader.

Beginning at the first biologist, said to be Aristotle, the author tells us of the discovery of anatomy and the circulation of the blood. Then comes the tremendous discovery of the microscope and the flow of knowledge to which it led. Here is the world of microbes, cells, chromosomes and living protoplasm and the discoveries which enabled Charles Darwin to evolve his theory of evolution and Mendel the theory of genetics.

The book tells, painlessly and effortlessly, of the lives of the men who dedicated themselves to the study of life's mysteries.

Fascinating.

HYPNOTISM AND CRIME by Heinze E. Hammerschlag. Rider & Co., 13s. 6d., 148 pages.

One of the perennial arguments put forward by the adherents of hypnotism is that no one can be made, under hypnosis, to commit a crime. This book attempts to show that people can, and have, committed such crimes. Unfortunately it is mostly composed of case histories dating, in all but

one instance, from the turn of the century. This, coupled with the rather heavy style of Teutonic scientific reporting, robs the book of some of its entertainment value. It is thorough, yes, but thoroughness alone doesn't prove anything.

And it's no good accepting the findings of certain courts of justice as irrefutable proof of the existence of a thing. If so, then we must admit that Witchcraft is a very real thing—old women were burned to death for being witches under the due process of law.

But it doesn't disprove it, either.

BRITISH S-F BOOK INDEX, 1955. Fantast (Medway) Ltd., Leach's Farm, Lynn Road, Walsoken, Wisbech, Cambs., 2s. 6d.

This is a duplicated effort of twenty-eight quarto pages, one side of each left blank. The production is good and it will be of interest to every collector. It sets out both author and title of every book published in Britain during the year, together with all relevant data as to publishers, price and number of pages.

Did you know that 133 books were published during that year? That three titles were duplicated, and that four more were simultaneously published in hard covers and pocketbook editions?

This is a must for those who collect, who want to know just what came out, when, and for all who take an interest in these things.